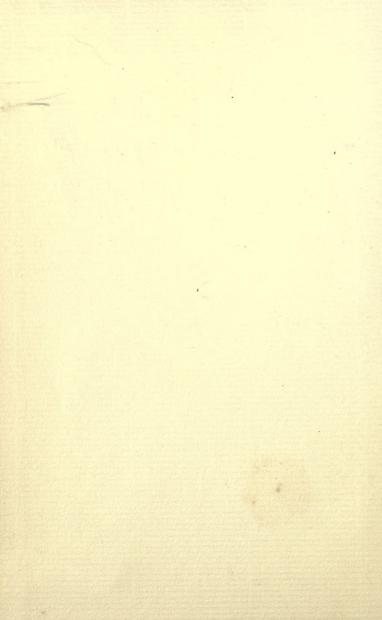
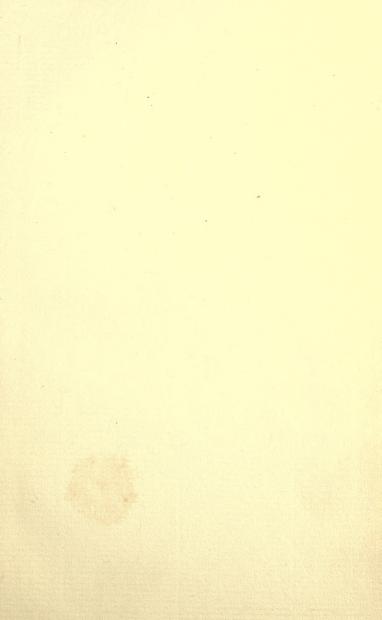


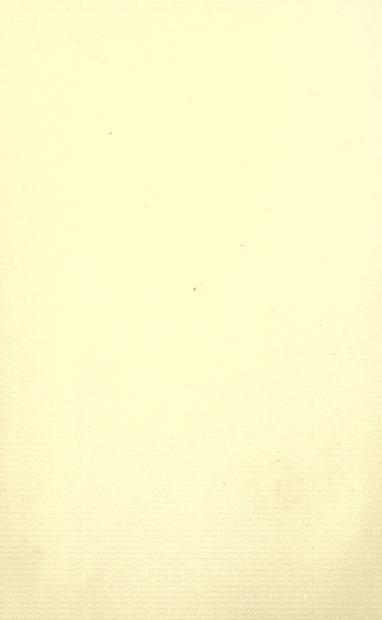
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A Colonial Wooing

By
Charles Conrad Abbott, M.D.



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RECALLING THE SEVERAL OCCASIONS WHEN THE FORTUNES

OF RUTH AND JOHN WERE SO EARNESTLY DIS
CUSSED, IT SEEMS AS FITTING AS IT IS

PLEASANT TO DEDICATE THIS

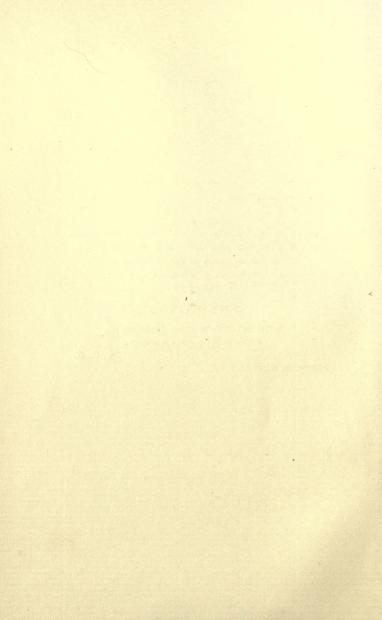
STORY TO

THE FRIEND

WHOSE INTEREST THEREIN URGED ME TO WRITE WHAT I HAVE WRITTEN.

C. C. A.

APRIL 10, 1895.



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I.

There was a strange silence everywhere, as is not uncommon in the month of August, for now the promises of summer had been made good, and the world is at rest. Not a leaf stirred, and, except the plaintive note of some far-off bird, I could hear only my own foot-falls. The trees and fields and shaded winding lane were as I had seen them last, when darkness shut them in, but now, in the early morning, it seemed as if the sun had brought sad tidings. It has always appeared to me that August days are days for retrospection, and that the mind is supersensitive at such a time. It takes notice of those things which in the hurry and clatter of June are overlooked. This is no mere whim, and on this occasion the effect was

to convince me that something unusual had happened or was about to occur.

I had heard of an oaken chest, with huge brass clamps, and to-day set out to find it. There was not a wagon to be seen when I turned from the lane into the township road, and so I had the dusty highway to myself, a furthering of my fancy. Even more lonely was the wood-road into which I turned, and of late it had been so little used, it was as much the meeting-ground of bird-life as of humanity. Everywhere it was shaded by cedars of great age or by elms under which the moss had grown since colonial days. Along this ancient way the rambler has little to remind him of the changes wrought in the passing century. What few houses are passed in the course of a long walk are old-time structures, and more than one has been abandoned. The reason was plain: the land is poor, and whatever inducements were held out to the original settlers had not been continued to the fifth and sixth generations. Still, not all the tract had reverted to forest. A little garden-plot about each of

INTRODUCTION

the cottages that were occupied was still held back, by spade and hoe, from the encroachments of wild growth, and in the last cottage to be reached, surrounded by every feature of an old-fashioned garden, lived Silas Crabtree. As a child I had feared him, and now I both disliked and admired him; why—as is so often the case—I could not tell.

The man and his house were not unlike. The cottage was a long, low building, one and a half stories high. A window on each side of the door barely showed beneath the projecting roof of a narrow porch extending the full length of the front. There was a single step from the porch to the ground. From the roof projected two squat dormer windows. The shingles were darkened by long exposure, and patches of moss grew about the eaves. Silas was like this. The windows and door and long low step recalled his eyes, nose, and mouth, overtopped by low projecting brows and unkempt hair, that were well represented by the cottage roof with its moss and dormers. So far the house

and its solitary inmate; but the open well with its long sweep, the clump of lilacs, the spreading beech with initials cut long years ago,—these were a poem.

While the day was yet young, I passed by, and Silas was sitting on the porch. The quiet of this month of day-dreams was unbroken. The cat-bird hopped about the grass, but was mute; a song-sparrow was perched on the topmost twig of a dead quince-bush, but did not sing; a troop of crows was passing overhead in perfect silence. Feeling more strongly than ever the moodiness of the morning, I strove to break the spell by shouting, with unnecessary emphasis, "Good-morning, Uncle Silas." With a sudden start the old man looked up and stared wildly about him. Straightway the cat-bird chirped, the sparrow sang, and from over the tree-tops came the welcome cawing of the crows. Even a black cat came from the house and rubbed its arched back against Silas's knees. The spell was broken, and the old man growled (for he could not talk as other men), "I'm glad you've come."

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"Oh, I was only passing by; were you asleep?"

"Sleepin' or not, I was thinkin' of you. Come in."

Stepping rather reluctantly into the yard, I sat down on the floor of the porch near Silas,—for he did not offer to get me a chair,—and waited for him to speak.

"As a boy," said Silas, in softer tones than I had ever heard before, "you had a grudge again' me, as your father had again' mine, and your grandpap again' mine, and so on away back. It never showed much, that I know of, but the feelin' was there: and yet we started even, for my folks came from England as long ago as yourn.

"But there's no Crabtree besides me, and I wanted to get things in shape, for there's some would like the old cottage that ain't goin' to get it. I don't know that there's any more to tell you." And Silas looked out towards the road and into the woods upon its other side.

I kept my seat. I could not do otherwise. The Silas of to-day was not he whom

I had known in years past. Although there was no evidence of it in the old man's words, I was convinced he had reference to me as his heir; but what of that? He might change his mind a dozen times, for he was not so very, very old,—not much, if any, over eighty; and what, indeed, had he to leave?

Many minutes passed, and then, as I made a slight movement, merely to change my position, Silas spoke in the same strangely softened voice. "Don't go, don't go; there's one thing more——" He suddenly paused, and stared, with a wild look, directly at me. The silence was painful; his strange appearance more so. In a moment the truth flashed across me: he was dead.

II.

I was not surprised to learn, immediately after the funeral, that I had been left the sole legatee of the man whose death I had witnessed. When I took formal possession of the cottage and its contents, I entered the house for the first time in my life. To

cross the threshold was to step backward into colonial times. How true it is that it needs at least a century to mellow a house and make it faintly comparable to out-of-doors!

The hall-way of the Crabtree cottage was neither short nor narrow, but you got that impression from its low ceiling and the dark wooden walls, which time had almost blackened. Lifting a stout wooden latch, I passed into the living-room, with its ample open fireplace, long unused, for a little airtight stove had done duty for both cooking and heating for many years. This was the only innovation: all else was as when its first occupant had moved into the "new" house and given over the log hut to other uses. The high-backed settle, the quaint, claw-footed chairs, a home-made table, with bread-trough underneath, seemed never to have been moved from their places since Silas's mother died. These made less impression than would otherwise have been the case, because with them was a very old and mysterious-looking desk. It was a bureau

with five brass-handled drawers, and above them the desk proper, concealed by a heavy, sloping lid. The dark wood had still a fine polish, and the lid was neatly ornamented with an inlaid star of holly wood. It, with the three-plumed mirror on the wall above it, was the eclipsing feature of the room. All else, well enough in its way, seemed commonplace. Drawing a chair in front of the desk, I sat down to explore it, but was bewildered at the very outset. Lowering the lid, the many pigeon-holes, small drawers, and inner apartment closed by a carved door, took me too much by surprise to let me be methodical. Everywhere were old, stained papers and parchments, some so very old the ink had faded from them; but there was no disorder. At last, knowing it was no time to dream, I drew out a bundle of papers from a pigeon-hole, and noticed in doing so that a strip of carved wood, which I had taken for ornament, slightly moved. It proved to be a long and very narrow drawer, and this again had a more carefully hidden compartment in the back, as a narrow line in

the wood showed. Peering into this, I found a scrap of paper so long and closely folded that it fell apart when opened; but the writing was still distinct. It was as follows: "It is his Excellency's, Genl. Howe's express order, that no person shall injure Silas Crabtree in his person or property." It was duly signed, countersigned, and dated Dec'r 9, 1776. So Silas, the great-grandfather, had been a Tory! I was prepared now for revelations of any kind. To look quietly over papers, one at a time, was too prosy an occupation, and the suggestion that there might be more secret drawers was followed until every nook and cranny had been laid bare,—and there were many of them.

The next day, as the place could not be left unguarded, I moved the old desk to my own home, and placed a tenant in the cottage; and now, there is not a scrap of paper among all that the desk contained that I have not read, and my comment is: colonial days were not so very unlike those of the present time. It is true, our ancestors' surroundings were very different, and

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much that was then accounted a luxury is now an absolute necessity, or so we think; but of one condition there can be no dispute, human nature was the same.

Among the many papers that had been so long preserved there chanced to be that rarest form of old documents, a journal. Almost two centuries ago, an eye-witness of the occurrences to be narrated made brief mention of the part he took therein. These, with various memoranda, which threw more or less light upon the doings of those days, were rolled together and enclosed in a quaint red leather wallet, from which the silver clasp had been taken; and from these timeworn records, which are still preserved, I have gathered the essential features of the story of Ruth Davenport, who in fact, and not merely in the author's fancy, was known to many as a "Quaker Fairy."

A Colonial Wooing

Chapter I.

A Fruitless Discussion.

"Mother, John has spoken—"

"Daughter, father will not approve-"

"Of John's having remarked it is a pleasant day?"

"I supposed that thee meant that he had—"

"Suggested so serious a matter as my taking up—"

"Daughter, thee is strangely giddy-"

"Mother, is thee not strangely hasty to suppose—"

"Ruth, dear, let me-"

"Yes, mother; but first let me-"

Both talked so nearly at once that it might be said that neither listened, and now a word

as to who these people were, this mother and daughter who apparently agreed only to disagree. It stands recorded in the minutes of an English Monthly Meeting of the Society of Friends that in the year 1666 Edmund Davenport, of Ayton, and Anne Pearson, of Monthorp, were married at Kirby Grindale. Their daughter Ruth was born twelve years after; and it is further on record that her mother, widowed but a year, married Matthew Watson, and in 1682 emigrated to America, and thirteen years later, having weathered all the privations of those primitive times, Ruth was a well-grown girl of seventeen and her mother a well-preserved woman of fifty. Constant toil, some anxiety, and a scarcely concealed longing for her old home across the sea had told upon the mother, and she would have been judged to be older than she really was when seen, as she was this bright October afternoon, busy with the much needed mending of various garments, for there were now two boys to care for. Thus occupied, Anne Watson was more disposed to look backward and recall the

brighter days long gone, and who can indulge in retrospective thought without its sobering the countenance, when the present ill compares to the past? Not that the woman was positively unhappy, but she had opposed the suggestion of coming to America, when broached, and yielded with but a mere show of grace. In short, in spite of much effort and prayer, she could not quite overcome her disappointment; and then Friend Stacy had seen the country from a man's point of view, and the acquiring of an estate being six-sevenths of his thought, he had grossly misrepresented the country, and there were endless hardships that the woman had to endure for years after their arrival. Matthew Watson, too, was wholly engrossed in the same worldly occupation of acquiring an estate.

To be poor and yet a Friend was simply a contradiction. Inability to acquire wealth argued an understanding too feeble to appreciate the teachings of George Fox. Business, the concerns of the world, may perhaps not have been quite six-sevenths of

the Friends' concerns, but it would seem as if as much effort was required to shake the dust from their shoes, when they entered meeting on the first day, as to shake the worldliness from their thoughts. How else, then, can we explain the remark during silent meeting one fifth day morning of Mahlon Stacy, when, hearing a loud clap of thunder, he muttered audibly, "Tut-tut-tut! my hay." Duty had brought him from the meadow to the meeting, but at a critical moment had left him in the lurch.

But more than all else that had sobered Ruth's mother was Ruth herself; for, as events in the past had proved, the mother was conscientiously a Friend and accepted Fox implicitly as her teacher and guide, and now as her daughter approached womanhood, she essayed, but in vain, to have her like unto herself. Ruth, although surrounded by Quaker influences all her life, soon began to make, so the world holds, the fatal mistake of thinking for herself. While never disobedient as a child, she was always independent, and the excellence of her judgment

caused frequent comment among her elders, but not dissociated with the fear that she might, by her too great self-reliance, prove something of a thorn in her parents' flesh in years to come. Her comely figure, the grace of every movement, and the brightness of dark-blue eyes that the hideous bonnet of those bigoted days could not conceal, caused many a young head to be turned as she entered meeting, and this the elders, in sober array in the gallery, had too often noticed not to hint at the unseemliness of the habit. "It is a concern upon my mind that we should restrain our children more; their thoughts are too much of this world and too little of their souls' salvation," Friend Stacy had recently remarked, and Ruth had severely criticised him when she reached "Why should we be restrained from loving that which is neither a device of man nor the devil. There is color, music, gayety everywhere, except in our houses, and yet we are asked to turn our backs upon it. That's what his sermon amounts to. I can look, without offence, at a blooming rose, if

it is out of reach, but must not pick it or put it on my kerchief. Mustn't indeed! I will." And with this vehement protest Ruth darted from the house, and before her parents could recover their astonishment, returned with an apron-full of scarlet autumn leaves and scattered them over the kitchen floor; then standing in front of her mother, who looked ill with fright, asked, "Would thee have the whole world steeped in dust and dinginess; never a blue sky or a rosy sunset? Always clouds above and bare ground beneath? Oh, for the gay cousins that we have in England, for which thee feel so much concern! How I would like to see them!" And again away she flew like a frightened bird, seeing that at last she had overtaxed her father's patience and he was about to speak. An hour later, when he came in, evidently with a fixed determination to sternly rebuke his step-daughter, he found her demure as the soberest "Friend" in all Chesterfield, and with "No Cross, No Crown," lying opened upon her lap. She looked up with the merest trace of a smile lighting her face, and

as it had always been, he was moved to say nothing. Matthew Watson was proud of his step-daughter and afraid of his neighbors, but could not have been forced to admit it. He had heard more than one comment that inwardly moved him, yet deemed it prudence not to speak in her defence. His standing in meeting might be affected. It had been soberly stated that the sun shone about her even when the day was cloudy, and that she needed no taper when she retired. Such was the gossip of meddlesome old women, and Matthew Watson had heard of the witchcraft in New England and was a little troubled; but he was an elder in meeting and must hold his peace. Not so Ruth's mother. She dared speak, at least in her own house, and so that same bright October afternoon she finally gained her daughter's attention and spoke her mind freely.

"Ruth, I insist that thee shall listen. Thee knows full well thy conscience troubles thee, and yet thee will not heed the warnings of the inward voice."

[&]quot;But, mother-"

"Do not speak, dear, until I have done. Thee cannot in thy soberer moments acquit thyself for such light conversation and-"

"And what?" asked Ruth, as her mother paused for a moment, opening her magnificent eyes to the fullest extent and gazing into her mother's face.

"And conduct towards John."

Ruth had been sitting on a low stool at her mother's feet during the conversation, but when she heard these words, she sprang to her feet and repeated them with an emphasis suggestive of mingled indignation and surprise.

"Conduct towards John! Why, I have known him since almost a baby, and never a word of this until now. What has been said to thee about us, or what has thee or father noticed that I should be so strangely taken to task?"

"Does thee not know that John is much

impressed by thee?"

"No, mother, nor is he aware of it, nor is thee, nor is any one except the idle busybodies that have crept into our scattered neighbor-

hood, or were here before we came. The only impression I ever made on John Bishop was when I jumped from the overturning boat and landed on his feet. I noticed he limped for half an hour afterwards."

"Ruth, Ruth, will thee never be serious?"

asked her mother, in despair.

"Never, mother dear, when thee persists in talking in such a way. John Bishop has his shop to look after, and I do not believe his business is so flourishing that he is thinking of a wife. Thee need not fear my friendly greeting, when we happen to meet, will cause him to lose his heart, and I have yet got mine in my own keeping. Why, mother, I'm but seventeen and he is-must be thirty. Really, you seem to be putting such ideas in my head in hopes that I will soon marry and leave you. Do you want me to leave you, mother dear, so very, very soon?" And again those deep blue eyes opened widely and pleaded, as usual, far more eloquently than any words.

"Indeed, I do not, Ruth, as thee should know;" but Ruth felt that perhaps her mother

had given such a thought some consideration and was not disposed to listen further. Kissing her mother while she was yet speaking, she turned suddenly and left the room.

Chapter II.

New to the Neighborhood.

Easy communication with Philadelphia, by water, had made it so practicable for the settlers of the back country, as the valley of Crosswicks Creek was then called, to procure such household articles and farm utensils as were needed, that so early as 1695 only grist-mills had as yet been established, and these were few and far between. The Indian mortars were still in common use, and he was the thriftiest settler who was the best mechanic and could most easily depend upon himself. The ordinary divisions of labor outside the village of Philadelphia were practically wanting, and so it was a decided novelty, and hailed as evidence of better days when perhaps a village would centre about some convenient point, when John Bishop and William Blake built a wheelwright-shop and smithy at a sharp bend of the winding

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road that led from the forest and scattered plantations of Burlington County, where it crossed the creek and continued to the river. It was a particularly pleasing feature of the neighborhood to those who were keenly bent upon acquiring an estate, because it was evidence of a steady and healthy growth of the scattered community, and it was hailed with keen delight by the descendants of those earliest settlers, English, Swedes, and Dutch, who, having provided for their few wants, were pleased to have a lounging-place; and so it came about that at Bishop and Blake's those who for the time being might be idle were soon wont to congregate.

Skilled workmen were then more prominent in the social world than now. Not that labor has ever lost its dignity, but wealth had not yet become the arrogant tyrant of to-day; and among the Friends some calling was required of every one. There was but one profession open to them, medicine, and but few had the opportunity, even if the inclination, to devote themselves thereto. To have a trade was a necessity; to be apprenticed

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and learn to work with hands as well as head the experience of every boy. To master the trade's secrets, to become a skilled workman, was, in short, to become a successful man; one that commanded, and deservedly so, the respect of his fellows.

Wheeled vehicles were not a prominent feature of the public roads at this time, and Bishop and Blake had but few carts to build or mend, but still they were not idle. They offered their services in every way as good mechanics, and there was enough simple furniture to be made and of miscellaneous repairing to keep their tools bright. The shop itself was a primitive affair, a long, low wooden shed, built of squared logs, and not unlike in general appearance many a dwelling in the lonely valley. There were two features, however, that appealed to every one who passed During summer and early autumn a superb, spreading oak near the shop door cast a welcome shade, wherein the lounger was well content to linger, and a roomy fireplace with its rude forge, that defied the most earnest efforts of winter to make the place

cheerless even when storms raged without. An all-pervading evidence of welcome greeted every comer, and a stranger was hailed with demonstrations of delight. Communication with the outside world, and especially with England, was infrequent, and a letter from across the sea would often be read to those gathered under the oak, with but scanty omission of strictly private matter. Naturally every unusual occurrence among the settlers was quickly known to all, and so every prolonged, conversation ultimately turned upon the future of the province.

As the warm October sunshine brings the bees and wasps to our south windows, where they busily hum and buzz as if they had the cares of the world upon their shoulders, so, this pleasant afternoon, it had brought several of the neighbors to the front of the shop, some with a purpose and, as usual, others without one. Among the former was Matthew Watson, to take away a mended tool that he had left, and as he was passing from the door he gave a disapproving glance at the little knot of idlers, as he thought them

who were standing about the old oak's gnarly trunk. As these few men were quite unconscious of any impropriety in congregating as they had done, they gave no heed to Friend Watson beyond a pleasant greeting, and so were the more surprised that he should interrupt their conversation.

"Is it not most unseemly," he asked, "to idle away such precious time, when the season is so favorable for labor? Is it possible that you have no greater concern upon your minds than idle gossip?"

"I was not aware, Neighbor Watson," remarked Robert Pearson, with some excitement, "that either I or these friends were idling our own time; and what if it were true, for you have yourself said it was our own time that was passing, and so not yours," giving emphasis to the "you" and "yours" with evident satisfaction, for Robert was a churchman of a belligerent stamp.

Matthew Watson had been so successful in worldly affairs that he had become in a measure dictatorial, as is so often the case, and this unfortunate feature had gradually

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intensified as his views of religion became more and more pronounced. Possibly he would not have burned a church or hanged a churchman, but he would have removed them from the province to the nearest desert.

Robert Pearson had turned his back upon his neighbor when he ceased speaking, and was about resuming his conversation that had been so strangely interrupted, when it occurred to him that he would still further speak his mind, and, facing about, added, "I am as much bound by my interests to this country as you are, hold as many acres, pay as large a tax, and trust I have a right to expect as much respect from my fellows. We were talking of a project that concerns us all, that of building a drawbridge over the creek, where the ferry now is. You know the ford was but a poor accommodation, and now the ferry is little better. A bridge would be greatly to our advantage."

"I do not know that the ferry has ever failed to bring me over safely," remarked Matthew, in a haughty tone, for his anger

still glowed under the thin covering of non-resistant principles.

"Nor has it failed me; but in winter, as you know, we have to trust to the uncertain ice at times, and that was nearly an accident when the ice broke behind your cart instead of under it. Your memory is short."

"I trust it will never become as short as thy tongue is flippant," Matthew replied, and moved away.

"Do, friends, do be guarded in your conversation, lest Friend Watson take offence," exclaimed William Blake, running, bareheaded, from the shop. "He may prejudice the neighbors and so we lose their trade."

"Don't worry on that score, William," replied Robert Pearson; "the whole province is not made up of Quakers, not even this township of Chesterfield, and, thank goodness, all are not of the stamp of Matthew Watson."

"I know, I know; but, friends, I've forty pounds silver money in this venture and John has but ten, and it weighs upon me that we may not succeed."

His hearers laughed heartily at the poor fellow's fears and began teasing him, when his partner, John Bishop, walked from the shop door. The little group at once turned towards him as he approached, for he was, though a young man, one that commanded the respect of all who knew him. The influence of his presence is not readily explained. There was nothing in his manner in the nature of a demand except for that respectful treatment that all true men ask for themselves; but beyond this was a subtle something, a look, a tone, a motion, what you will, that attracted attention and excited admiration. Of medium height, properly proportioned, with delicate features, but with chin so far prominent and square as to indicate firmness, yet without a trace of obstinacy; in short, a man capable of forming an opinion, and not incapable of relinquishing it if convinced of its defectiveness. In other words, John Bishop was a superior man; one that would be looked to, if not always as a leader, at least as one to whom it is desirable to listen should he see fit to speak.

"William, thee left an iron in the fire that is far more likely to suffer than thy forty pounds." And taking the hint, John's timid partner slipped quietly back to the shop and was seen no more. Turning then to Robert Pearson, John continued, "Let us counsel patience when we have so much to do to make our community a success, and certainly anything like a quarrel is a step backward."

Robert said nothing in reply, and while it was plain that he was annoyed and took the reproof as a disguised threat, it was equally evident that he would be very slow to pick a quarrel with John Bishop, than whom there was no more peaceful man in the province, and yet none that would more promptly face danger if the necessity arose. To these gifts should be added a happy quickness of wit that grasped an awkward situation promptly and placed others at ease more quickly than their own efforts would have done. "You were talking of the ferry, I think, so let us walk down to it now, and on the spot we can better plan for the change to a bridge, if determined upon." And the group started for

the creek, John Bishop and Robert Pearson taking the lead.

It was but a short distance, a small fraction of a mile, and in a few minutes these earnest men were standing on the east bank of the creek, which, after curving and twisting through the wide meadows, was here, at the ferry, narrow, rapid, and deep.

Chapter III.

"There's Many a Slip, etc."

The lane leading from Matthew Watson's to the creek was a short but very winding one, and for much of the way well shaded by thrifty trees. A more direct route might have been laid out without the loss of any tillable or pasture land. Years ago, when the house was built, there had been some discussion concerning this lane, and Matthew now regretted at times that he had yielded to others, for he knew it to be a common saying among his worldly neighbors that the lane was as crooked as its owner. But Matthew's wife had taken matters in hand at the critical moment and astonished her overbearing husband by a firmness that was before then unsuspected. All attractiveness should not be sacrificed to the selfish convenience of the men. The landscape, as she saw it from the single window of her little parlor

and from the two larger windows of the roomy kitchen, had several pleasing features, and these she succeeded in preserving, when the suggestion was made to clear the intervening ground of its scattered trees and cut a straight and level road to the creek's bank. A stately tulip-tree, a branching elm, and half a dozen sturdy scarlet-oaks crowned a bit of slightly rising ground, and between them she had the road to wind, and even prevailed on her husband to plant other trees and a short hedge of rhododendron, that the whole way might in time become a most pleasant place. She would indeed have gone even further in this matter of landscape gardening, but Matthew's patience was exhausted, and some one had made the unfortunate remark that his wife seemed to be reproducing some of the features of her old home. Then Matthew became obstinate beyond cure, for it had ever been a sore trial that his wife could not see the world about them with his eyes. Were they not abundantly prosperous, and was not this all-sufficient, and an evidence, too, that heaven was smiling upon them?

What more could a woman want? "Had they not a home, and food and clothing in abundance?" he had been known to remark on more than one occasion, but he never gave a thought to the fact that the yarn was spun, the food prepared, while he was leisurely discussing with his neighbors the affairs of the meeting. But Matthew was neither lazy nor heartless, nor his wife given to complaining. It was merely an instance of a woman's unspoken thoughts not always according with her husband's expressed convictions.

Sauntering down this pleasant lane came Ruth with her two brothers, and when she felt sure she was quite out of hearing she slowly sang, to the boys delight,—

Reclined beside the crystal rill,
When all is lonely, all is still,
Save wild birds' songs from yonder hill,
Oh, let me muse in secrecy.

Here let me in these shades reclined Forget the ills I left behind, That love was vain or friends unkind, That fortune looked not smilingly.

A song of sorrow suits the day, No star of love doth light my way, Friendships ere yet they bloom decay, All is delusive phantasy.

Before her song was finished they were standing at the water's edge. The crimson flush of the Virginia-creeper that climbed a tall cedar behind her was a perfect background for this fair young woman as she stood gazing into the swift stream, catching glimpses of herself whenever, for a second, the water's surface was unruffled. Pleasures come and go as quickly as these reflections of myself, she was thinking, and then she held her face up and looked intently across the stream, but not so much at the wooded slope that on that side hemmed it in, as at the curling smoke that she knew came from the fire in John Bishop's shop. "How could mother get such an idea into her head?" she said to herself, but loud enough for her brothers to hear.

"What has mother got in her head?" asked the younger of the two boys, a persistent, inquisitive lad of eleven summers.

"Nothing, dear," Ruth replied. "Please try to catch me a fish for supper."

"But I want to know," he whined, in his

usual trying way.

"And thee cannot know, so go on with thy fishing."

"Then I'll ask mother when we get home."

"And then I will no more sing to thee, my boy."

"Thee is real ugly to me; I won't catch

thee any fish."

"Am I, dear? Well, I am ugly to everybody and feel cross as a bear." And again Ruth looked at the little thread of smoke that curled among the branches of the towering oak by the shop door.

But if ugly in the eyes of her little brother, she was not to others as she stood on the bank of the creek, her stately figure trim as the timid fawns that she often started in the woods, her golden-brown hair that rippled down her back like the laughing waters of a pebbly brook, her clear skin that was slightly darkened by the sunshine to which it was

constantly exposed, but not to the concealment of the color that came and went according to her mood, the well-arched eyebrows darker than her hair, the straight nose and well rounded, but not too prominent chin; these made up a picture that seemed to need just such an occasion to flash their full significance upon the beholder, and there she stood when John Bishop and Robert Pearson, leading the little group that we have seen at the shop, came suddenly into view, directly across the stream.

Ruth recognized them at a glance and turned suddenly to go home, or at least to be out of sight, but she was not sufficiently guarded in her movements. She had been standing on apparently firm ground and had paid no heed to its constant trembling nor noticed its gradual yielding to her weight. Her more violent motion now caused the earth, which was deeply undermined, to suddenly give way. She was not quick enough to leap from where she stood to the fast ground, and in an instant was struggling in the rapid water and borne by the current into

its channel. A piercing cry went up as she disappeared, a cry that was more than one for help, yet he who so plainly heard it had no such thought. She had not cried out "help!" but "John!"

In an instant, seeing what had happened, John Bishop had freed himself of his coat and heavy boots and plunged into the creek, before his companions had realized what had really happened. A few strokes brought him to the spot where Ruth had sunk, and the moment he reached it she reappeared, her hair floating at full length upon the surface of the water and her eyes widely opened, but staring vacantly at the sky, after a single glance of recognition. John placed an arm beneath her shoulders, and thus bearing his fainting burden, with no little difficulty stemmed the current and reached the shore.

John had but followed an ordinary impulse; he had seen a human being in imminent danger and snatched her from it, so he thought; but what meant that strange feeling in his breast when he looked so steadily into her vacant, staring eyes, as he laid her

limp form upon the ground and, still supporting her head, said, imploringly, "Ruth, Ruth, you are in no danger now; do speak!"

The effects of the shock were slowly passing away, and before John's companions could reach him, by means of the clumsy ferry, Ruth had revived and murmured, but not so gently that John did not hear her, "I thank thee, John; do please let me return home."

Ruth attempted to rise as she spoke, but her strength had not returned with her consciousness, and she was utterly helpless.

"Let me carry thee home, Ruth," said John, very gently. And he was about to take her up in his arms as a mother would lift her little child, when the men, who had crossed the creek, came up and made a circle about them. All asked at once concerning her and were anxious to be of use, and the bewildering babel of many voices was evidently having an ill effect upon Ruth's tortured nerves. John was quick to see the annoyance their presence caused, and motioning to them to stand aside and keep silent, he lifted

Ruth from the ground and started towards her home. The men slowly followed. She made no movement as she was borne along in this strange manner, and without a word spoken the little procession reached Matthew Watson's house.

Ruth's mother chanced to see them coming, and met them at the door. The two boys, who until now had been too frightened to speak, rushed up to her and shouted, "Sister's drowned!"

"Not drowned, but might have been," John remarked, hastily. "Speak, Ruth." But Mrs. Watson did not hear him. Her boys' words were ringing in her ears, and with clasped hands she sank upon the seat of the little porch and gazed vacantly at her daughter, still firmly held in John's strong arms. For a moment she could not speak, and then recovering, she asked, "Is she really gone?" Assured to the contrary by both Ruth and John, who spoke at the same moment, she arose and led the way into the house.

Chapter IV.

Too Much about Nothing.

THERE were no Indian runners available by whom to report to distant parts the important occurrences of any day; nevertheless news of all kinds quickly spread, and the day following the accident to Ruth members of every family in the valley and beyond its bounds came hither, the men usually gathering at the wheelwright-shop and the women at Ruth's home, that the minutest details of the accident might be obtained. John Bishop, to his great annoyance, was the hero of the hour, and when not being closely questioned was gazed at as the fortunate man who had rescued Ruth. The prominence of Matthew Watson in the community had, of course, much to do with such general interest in an incident which really had no heroic element. Indeed, one observing old man had been heard to say, "Had it been poor

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folks, none on 'em would so much as lookt out o' their winders."

The eye-witnesses naturally came in for a full share of attention also, and it was amusing to hear each one explain how it was that he was too late to be of any real use in the emergency. Their explanations made them heroes only in their own eyes. One, more loquacious and a coward at heart, remarked, as if it was a witty thought, "It looks like to me that John knew all about it beforehand, and it was planned to have old Watson look with favor on him," and then laughed immoderately; but his merriment was soon cut short. The remark had been overheard, and without seeing who struck him, the fellow rolled upon the grass. Robert Pearson had no patience with idle babblers, and besides that, Ruth was distantly related.

John Bishop took the praise bestowed upon him patiently at first, but before the day passed it became tiresome and then distasteful. The truth was, the incident had influenced him in a way that his neighbors did not suspect. He constantly saw,

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not Ruth merely rescued, but her single piercing glance, and then staring at him with those dark-blue eyes that really saw not; and then there would come the vision of Ruth pleading to be allowed to walk home, with those eyes reillumined with a light not merely of consciousness returned—or was this all but a feverish fancy of his own?

It was not until two days after the accident that Matthew Watson called at the shop to thank John for his timely assistance. The latter saw him coming and divined his errand, but there was no escaping the inevitable interview, and John put on as cheerful a countenance as possible and determined to anticipate Matthew by changing the character of the conversation, or if the girl's rescue must be mentioned, he would do the talking himself. He had been a passive listener long enough.

"How is thy daughter, Ruth, this morning?" he asked as Matthew entered the shop. "I trust she is well over the annoyance of an unintended bath and is in no danger of catching a fever from after-excitement."

"Yes, um! yes; I called, John, to tell thee how greatly indebted——"

"Now please be good enough, Neighbor Watson, not to talk of the matter. Why, for two whole days there has been nothing for me to do but stand and listen, and if I took up a hammer or saw, it was plain that I gave offence," and John hoped the appeal would end the conversation, but was mistaken. In the quiet of colonial days events did not follow in such quick succession that in two days a matter like this would be forgotten.

"But then it was proper that I should express——"

"Yes, yes, I know; but really, Neighbor Watson, there is too much made of the matter, and if Ruth has not suffered any ill effects, there is nothing further to be said." And John again hoped for silence in the future.

Matthew Watson could not understand John's motive in baffling his efforts to talk the matter over, and John did not suspect that Matthew had more to say than merely a formal thanking for effective assistance at a

critical time. It seemed too good an opportunity to let his views be known concerning Ruth's future to be prevented by the ready tongue that had interrupted him so successfully.

"What thee says, John, may be quite true," remarked Matthew, after a moment's pause in the conversation, "but I had another matter on which I had a concern to speak to thee, and it seems more fitting to do so now than ever before, although upon my mind and a concern, too, of Ruth's mother."

What can he have upon his mind? wondered John, as he carefully laid his hammer upon the bench and faced Matthew, with his arms folded. "If I am to be lectured, why, here I am, and let's get through with it," he said, lightly.

"Thee knows, John, that thy mind leads thee to Ruth, for it is common report, and Friends have remarked how, in meeting, thy eyes continually rest upon her."

Matthew evidently expected a reply, pausing as he did for so long a time, for John simply kept his eyes fixed upon the speaker.

"We cannot approve of it; she is but a child and thee has yet thy way to make in the world. It will be years yet before thou hast acquired——"

"Stop!" interrupted John, with a step forward that was just short of a menace. do not know what the common report is, but I would like to know who started it. And my eyes rest upon Ruth, do they? in meeting. Well, I suppose thee means upon her bonnet, for it covers her head more completely than thy hat does thine. And my thoughts are upon her! Did thee not say she was but a child? If I mistake not, she is almost out of her childhood, and thee can rest assured that her own thoughts of her own self will be entirely respected by John Bishop. I do not know what thy plans for the future may be concerning Ruth, nor is it my business at all, but if ever a young man may speak to an older one advisedly, let me say, at this time, that thy plans will come to nothing unless they accord with Ruth's. And now, if thee pleases, I will return to my work, for there are neighbors waiting for me." And saying this,

John went to the shop door and called his partner, who had been busy out of doors at John's suggestion, and was all-impatiently waiting to be recalled.

The interview was not a satisfactory one. Matthew Watson saw defiance in John's eyes, if he could not discover it in his words, and stood gazing intently into the ashen coals that had nearly lost their ruddy glow. There was so much he would like to say, but he felt that he was watched by a determined man, who would check at its very outset any further attempt to speak. Matthew Watson, one of the community's petty tyrants, and a most prominent figure in meeting, had met his match.

"William," remarked John, as that young man entered the shop, "had we not better finish Stacy's cart-wheel? He may call for it to-morrow."

"Yes, John—Good-morning, Friend Watson. How is Ruth to-day? I do hope she is none the worse for her terrible fright." And William hovered about him as though he were the king and he an expectant subject.

John nearly lost his temper, and after some struggling with himself, finally said, in rather commanding tones, "This is not the time to give to such matters; let us heat the irons and fit them now." And William Blake, with an imploring look towards Matthew, for he longed to hear something of Ruth that he might repeat to any callers who might happen in, worked vigorously at the bellows and sent myriads of sparks darting up the chimney.

Still, Matthew continued to gaze intently at the fire, unheeding William for the time, and vainly endeavoring to so collect his thoughts that he might at least fire a parting shot on retiring, and appear not to be the defeated man that he was. It would be something gained to have the truth concealed from William; but Matthew was not equal to the occasion. All he could say was, "Yes, William, Ruth is quite well, and would be pleased to see thee. The Friends have all been very kind."

William was about to follow Matthew Watson from the shop, desirous of sending Ruth some pretty message, it may be, but

John stopped him before he had taken a second step. "Thy place is here, William; and if thee cannot remain at thy work we must close this partnership."

"Close this partnership!" repeated William, in a surprised and slightly frightened manner; "why, John, I have forty pounds to thy ten, and surely that gives me the advantage."

John smiled, although his temper was yet aroused. "I am not sure what thee means by an advantage, but what would thy forty pounds be without I looked after them and thee and my own interests? It may be forty to ten, but the care and labor is all on my side, and I will gladly buy thee out."

"But what would I do?" asked William, now a good deal worried, for he saw his partner was wholly in earnest and expected a serious reply. "Has thee the ready money?"

"Do? why, spend thy time visiting Ruth; or, better yet, perhaps Neighbor Watson would employ thee on his plantation, and then thee could see her every day." And John threw down a hammer in his hand and looked out the little window near the forge.

"Does thee really think that Ruth would look with favor on my visits and——"

"William, now and for all time let me say that I must not hear Ruth discussed in this shop. There is a limit to my patience if none to others' lack of judgment; and isn't it very unchristian to be engaged in such idle conversation, and unworthy a man to talk so freely of other people, and of a most worthy young woman at that? Do confine thyself to thy work and to what we spoke of. I will gladly buy thy interest, for I feel that we can thrive better if more widely planted."

"I did not know thee was dissatisfied. Thee has said nothing like this until now; and why, as I have been taught my trade, should I not buy thee out?" asked William, and he looked very uncomfortable as he spoke, for it was a dangerous question, as he had learned to depend upon his partner whenever serious matters arose, and feared his own judgment upon most occasions.

"I would rather buy than sell," replied John, "and I do not see in what manner it is

a concern of others. Thee did not consult with thy friends when we entered upon this venture, and why take thy personal affairs to them when it is proposed to withdraw from it? Has thee no judgment of thy own?"

"But, John, we are prospering now, and if we remain blessed, why, perhaps Ruth——"

"Hush!" John exclaimed, fiercely; so fiercely, indeed, that William nearly fell over the anvil, he was so startled. It was a fortunate fright, so far as John was concerned, for William said, meekly, "If thee insists, I suppose I must."

"There is no insistence and no 'must' about it. I will buy thy interest, if thee will cheerfully and of thy own accord part with it; but if thee feels forced or over-persuaded, then I will not."

"But if thee is so desirous in the matter, what better can I do?" asked William, with endless trouble pictured in his countenance.

"That is for thee to judge," replied John.

Before another word was spoken a shadow crossed the floor of the shop and John, looking up, saw the outline of Matthew Watson's

head and shoulders near the little window, which was open. Why he was there he could not tell. There was no apparent reason. Had he been listening to the conversation? He was about to call through the window, then checked himself, and with nothing further being said about the dissolution of partnership, John and William worked steadily upon the irons of Stacy's cart-wheel.

Chapter V.

A Worse Fate threatened.

THE women of the Crosswicks Valley had little to entertain them beyond the affairs of the meeting and of their own homes. Visiting, in anything approaching a formal way, was not common. The houses generally were far apart and the roads and by-paths too rough, in many places, to make walking a pleasure, or more than practicable upon urgent occasion. Horses could not always be spared that women might ride. The long established custom, however, of attending meeting on First and Fifth days gave excellent opportunity for gossipy conversation, both before and after the services were over, and these were never neglected. How much could the old oak in the Crosswicks meetingyard tell if there was a tongue in that tree! Its enormous branches overspreading a wide grass-plot have shaded many a fair damsel

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and gentle swain who lingered long after their prosy parents considered time enough had elapsed wherein to exchange commonplaces.

"Is thee not keeping Joseph too long?" once called out an impatient father, as his daughter showed no disposition to bring her conversation to a close. "I hope thee will never think that of me," she whispered to Joseph, with a winsome smile, and then the demure little Quakeress hurried to her father's carriage and gravely discussed with her mother the sermon they had heard, as though she were the head of a family instead of the youngest child.

While youth remained there was always enough worldliness and sweet, harmless deception to hold back the austerities of the elders. No positive wickedness, but mischief and an assertion of the natural man that no follower of George Fox ever escaped, although in later years every one strove to forget it and cautioned their children against "the wiles of the adversary." Strange delusion, that of such intense mortification

of the flesh. But while the worthy elders did their best by precept and example to rob the young of many of life's pleasures, they could not make existence an altogether colorless, songless pilgrimage. Nature was never set aside by a sermon, and the joys of existence denied to the eye and ear were compensated for, not occasionally, but daily, by these same elders in gluttonous feasting, to the point of clogging the intellect; a custom coeval with the rise of their faith. To be sure, Aunt Lydia Blaylock said even more than this, but what led to her being turned out of meeting was the remark, "The certainty of a good dinner nerves them to the infliction of a long sermon."

The young Friends that subscribed to their parents' views frequently made many a mental reservation, resolving to question more closely for themselves when of maturer years; but when these came, life had so many added responsibilities, it too often happened that an indifferent acquiescence to the forms of the society resulted. But there was another and possibly less doleful aspect of

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this stern religion among the young. Often has it happened that, when two or three have chanced together, freedom from care and from the restraint of a parent's presence has moved their sober steps to a quicker motion; and while no one would be malicious enough to say that they were dancing, it was, in sober truth, a dangerously near approach thereto. The spirit was indeed willing, but their fear was overpowering. How nearly we may approach the worldly and yet be safe has been the tenor of many a long discussion when this topic was ventured upon; and how can a ribbon jeopardize the soul been a problem that by night and day has vexed the young mind to a degree of desperation far more destructive of spiritual peace than a bit of color to relieve the monotony of an illcontrived, uncomfortable gown.

All this in its various phases had passed through Ruth Davenport's mind, and, having the blood of her father's people in her veins, she was brave enough to speak her thoughts and to express dissatisfaction with an evasive answer; and when, after a long night's re-

cuperative rest, she felt ready to meet the world on its own terms, it was with no spirit of meekness that she saw the long array of sedate Friends who had gathered under her mother's roof to congratulate them both and administer to their spiritual needs. With some show of grace Ruth took the wellmeant sermon on gratitude for life saved, and would have been happy had this one woman who first spoke been the spokeswoman of the company. Not so; each old woman was confident she would be moved to speak, and in anticipation of the opportunity had composed a sermon; but Ruth had no patience left when the third worthy, growing dolorously poetical, was moved to say, "To think our young friend might have been drowned, and her little body never found-"

"Mother, mother!" she exclaimed, "do make the Friends go away or I'll go mad!" And she rushed from the room, to the mingled surprise, consternation, and regret of those present. It was some moments before she would consent to return, and when she did, her defiant looks put at once an end to all

attempts at further preaching. Things took a rather more cheerful and certainly a far more practical turn; for not an old woman among them but was sure that the accident would end in a fever,-did not Ruth's strange manner plainly point that way ?--and so had brought an abundance of their remedies. What a display was there upon the kitchen table! Every herb that ever grew in West Jersey was generously represented; and if every considerate Friend was to be duly considered, there was no escaping a watery death after all. As Ruth said to her mother, when the last visitor had departed, "I do not know but I had rather choke in Crosswicks Creek than be drowned in a deluge of herb tea. The taste wouldn't be so bad."

Ruth's mother gently laughed, and while the smile yet played upon her patient mouth Matthew Watson entered with a frown and contracted brows that showed trouble was brewing. Ruth noticed it, and in a moment felt that she was the cause of her step-father's ill-humor, if such it proved to be.

"Just see here, father, what the neighbors

have brought in," pointing to the herbs in bundles lying upon the table; "if thee gets short of hay, thee'll know where to come."

"I would prefer to find thee less given to levity when I come in. The Friends have said thee has been quite unmoved by their admonitions and prayers and so given offence that reflects upon me. I am sorry thee is not led to be inwardly as well as outwardly a Friend."

"What, mother, is thy word as to the meeting forced upon us; had I not cause to break up what even thee thought an unwise assembling?" asked Ruth, quite indifferent to what her step-father had said, and plainly showing what she felt.

"Ruth, I did not say so; the Friends were very kind," replied her mother, frightened lest she should also be scolded by her husband.

"I know thee did not say so, but that was in thy thoughts, and thee smiled when I talked of the oceans of herb tea." And then, after saying this to her mother, Ruth turned about, and with perfect fearlessness in her

eyes and abundant, ill-concealed scorn in her lips, said, in a very different voice, "No, father, I am not a Friend in the sense thee advocates, and never can be. Thee does not remember that I am a Davenport and not a Watson, and among them only my father was a Friend, and not, I hope, of such an unbending type as so many of those that make up the Crosswicks meeting."

"Ruth, Ruth!" faintly spoke her mother.

"Thee is an unruly, rebellious child, that brings a scandal upon us," remarked Matthew Watson, and he turned to leave the room.

"Rebellious? Does thee not recall the fact that I did not come to America of my own accord? Does thee not know that when I have coaxed mother to tell me of my cousins in Yorkshire, that it has made me long to go to them, until I thought that that meant leaving mother, and then I was content again; and when thee took mother from her home, thee knew that I had also to come, or thy words would have prevailed nothing; and when since then have I been a source of discomfort to thee? It is as easy to talk with-

out forethought at home as at meeting, and thy one word 'rebellious' is as little called for as the sermon on 'levity' by Friend Lambert, who has so frequently to be counselled by the Friends to be less worldly in his demeanor. If mother is willing, and the way is provided, I will go back to Yorkshire. I hope my cousins will take me in."

"But thee does not know that they would. The way to a passage might be found." And Matthew put his hand upon the door-latch.

"Matthew, Ruth shall never leave me willingly," her mother said, in a tone that was startling to both husband and daughter,—a tone so full of meaning that it ended the conversation.

Chapter VI.

A Letter from England.

THE good ship "Bristol," William Smith, Commander, that had made many voyages from English ports to Philadelphia, sighted the capes and slowly worked her way up the broad bay, and after many a trying hour, held by baffling winds and perverse currents, she at last cast anchor in front of the thriving village founded by Penn. Her voyage of nearly forty days had been uneventful, and it was with a feeling of relief that the passengers and crew again found themselves on shore. Those who were new-comers found much to attract their attention, and many were the inquiries made as to the whereabouts of the friends who had preceded them and by glowing accounts of the wonderful country had induced them to follow. The captain had his packet of letters to distribute, some to the thrifty merchants of the little town, and

others to be sent to the back-country settlements. One such communication, larger than the ordinary folded sheet, and impressively sealed with an abundance of red wax, bore this direction: Matthew Watson, in Chesterfield, Co. Burlington, Province of West New Jarsie. After some trouble safe conveyance was found for this official-looking document, and on the day following the arrival of the "Bristol" a stout shallop spread its dingy sail, and at sunrise, taking advantage of both wind and tide, started up the river, bound for Crosswicks Creek. The outlook then was favorable for a quick trip, but before noon the wind had died away, and when the tide turned there was nothing to do but to cast anchor and wait.

The crew of four men were not troubled at this turn of affairs. Their business was to ply between the two points mentioned, and the world was not then in such haste that letters or merchandise lost significance or value if received a day or a week later than was possible, but never probable. This early November day, rich with a golden haze that

brought all beauty better into view, was idly spent on board, and after the commonplaces of wondering when they could proceed had been passed, each man took himself unto himself and wondered why more of his people did not flock hither to this land of endless promise. The captain was for a while otherwise engaged. After looking at the superscriptions on the letters he had had placed in his charge and wondering whether they contained good news or ill, he took a small book from his pocket, and summing up the probable gains of the year, said to himself, "If the season ends as well as it began, I shall have enough to carry out my plans and will make a change. I wonder if I could sell my boat to any one in Chesterfield. I will talk to John Bishop when we anchor at the ferry."

The ferry was not reached until late the next day, and then, when the boat was seen coming slowly up the creek, many of those who lived near came down to the landing, out of idle curiosity, or for such goods as they were expecting, or to receive possibly a

letter from "home," for by this endearing term nearly every one still spoke of England. Matthew Watson had, among the first, received his well-sealed letter, which he carried exposed to the gaze of the by-standers, with a conscious air, until he reached his house.

"What is it?" asked his wife, as he entered the room where she was sitting, facing the cheerful fire upon the hearth.

"A letter."

"From friends in Philadelphia?"

"From England." And then adjusting his full-moon glasses, scanning every seal, scratch, and pen-mark upon the outside, proceeded slowly to open and read the letter. It was a long communication, and before he had finished reading he laid it down, and, removing his spectacles, said, "Ruth."

"Ruth has gone to Neighbor Pearson's,

dear; what is it?"

"I wish she would remain more with her own people and not visit Neighbor Pearson so frequently. She has been left an estate."

"Left an estate! Why, Matthew, what does thee mean?" asked his wife, rising from

her chair and walking to where her husband was standing by the window.

"Her uncle Timothy has left her money and personal effects of value provided she shall return to England and make her home with her father's people. If she declines, the property goes to her cousins. What does thee think; is it well that she returns?"

"This is too suddenly placed before us to speak advisedly, and Ruth must be consulted. It is her future that is concerned, and she is old enough to be her own counsellor in such a matter; but the thought of her leaving me is very grievous. I do wish she would return." And Anne Watson, more troubled than she wished to admit, looked earnestly over the fields towards the ferry, to see if her daughter was coming. There was then no one in sight, but a moment later there came into view from behind the rhododendron hedge Ruth and John Bishop, in earnest conversation.

"She is coming now!" exclaimed one of the boys; and opening the door, he called, "Sister Ruth, there's a letter for you from

England with lots of money in it, and you've got to go 'way to get it and—" But the boy's father checked the child's startling announcement by a sudden pull at his collar that sent him trotting backward across the kitchen floor.

"What does brother mean?" Ruth asked, with a thoroughly puzzled look upon her flushed face, for her conversation with John Bishop had evidently been of an exciting character.

"There is a letter from England that is of much moment, particularly to thyself, and we will consider its contents at the proper time," replied her step-father, with a glance at John Bishop, which was not lost upon him or upon Ruth.

"Farewell, Ruth," John remarked, scarcely noticing the others who had gathered about her, and was about to turn away when Ruth said,—

"Stay, John; mother may wish to say how grateful she feels, and this is thy first visit since that unlucky day."

There was a play upon John's features

that strongly suggested the idea he considered it quite the opposite, as he again faced the whole Watson family on their porch, and shook hands with Ruth's mother, who had come forward and said, "Truly, John, I do not know how to thank thee; thee must read my heart."

"Heart-reading is often a difficult task," John replied, and his eyes wandered towards Ruth, who was anxious that the interview should end, for she was very curious to know how that letter from England concerned her. Holding out her hand with an air that made her step-father frown and stare, she said, "Good-by, John; I am obliged to thee for seeing me across the ferry." And he, taking the hint, bade the assembled family farewell and turned towards his shop.

"Is it possible thee requires John's assistance to cross the ferry, Ruth? Could thee not take one of the boys with thee, if thee must go so frequently to Robert Pearson's?" asked Matthew, with a tone that had more suggestiveness than the mere words.

"John offered to come, seeing I was alone,

as I passed the shop, and said he wished to speak with me. Besides, I had not seen him since the other day, and I had something to say to him; and why," Ruth's voice ringing with a trace of anger that meant defiance, as Matthew well knew, "should I not go to Neighbor Pearson's? Is not Robert cousin or something of mother's? When they seem not to want me I will stay away."

"Ruth, Ruth," gently spoke her mother, "thee forgets."

"No, mother, I forget nothing; it's a pity I didn't; but what is this wonderful letter all about? Was it sent to me, or mother, or who?" And Ruth showed by her rapid speaking that she was, if not quite a woman grown, so near it that she recognized the difference between it and childhood. Then kissing her mother, she said again, "Do tell me about this letter."

"If thee will compose thyself, Ruth," her step-father replied, "I will tell thee about it. It is from Revell Stacy, and he is authorized to inform thee, as he does through me, that thy uncle Timothy Davenport has left thee

property sufficient for thy maintenance, if thee returns to England, but it goes to thy cousins if thee declines to accept the conditions. What does thee think?"

"Think?" said Ruth, "think about it?" And while speaking she walked from front of the fire to the middle of the room, and standing on tiptoe, first on one foot and then on the other, as if about to begin a dance for their amusement, and then actually sang in her parent's presence, keeping time with her body,—

"Money, money,
Bread and honey,
Dresses new and dresses gay;
Lovers many,
Cares not any—"

then stopping as suddenly as she began, dropped on her knees at her mother's feet and, looking the astonished woman directly in the face, added,—

"Mother, must I go away?"

"I am astonished!" exclaimed Matthew Watson, "singing and dancing in my house. Anne, is thy daughter ill?"

"No, father," exclaimed Ruth, standing up before him and giving him one of those steady, fearless looks that made him lose confidence in himself,—"no, I am not ill, but I have had too much to happen in one day perhaps. This is indeed sudden; but as to leaving mother, no, not for any fortune in England or all the fortunes in all England, and thee can send word to Revell Stacy as soon as thee chooses."

"Do not be rash, dear," Ruth's mother almost whispered; "thee must think it over."

"Very well, then, I'll think it over and ask Cousin Robert what he thinks," said Ruth, quietly.

Her suggestion to refer it to Robert Pearson made her step-father look very black, and he closed the lid of his desk with a startling slam.

Chapter VII.

The Sale of the Shallop.

WINTER was fast approaching, but while the dreamy days of the Indian summer had come and gone, there was still a pleasant warmth at noon-tide, and wherever the sunshine found entrance among the old trees along the creek's north shore, one had little thought, while wandering there, of the deep and dreary snows that would so soon cover every winsome feature of the valley. Making some flimsy excuse, the shallowness of which was still too deep for his partner to fathom, John Bishop laid down his tools a little before noon, and saying he might not be back quite as promptly as usual, passed out of the shop. Instead of going towards his home, he walked in the opposite direction, and as he passed a neighbor's cottage, whistled to the dog, that was only too glad to follow. There was much passing in John's mind, as his counte-

nance plainly showed, and while he felt he must have some one to talk to, there was but one to whom he could talk, and she was not accessible; so he whistled for the dog, and petted him extravagantly when he came bounding up to him. Man and dog made there, as they stood beneath the almost leafless trees, a pretty picture. John's brown hair, dark skin, and keen gray eyes, that flashed at times beneath the straight brows that shaded them, were now lighted by the mellow light of a late November'day, one of those dreamy days when a man of brains will indulge in a contemplative stroll and be the better for it. There is a hazy, perhaps even an indistinct outlook, but the light is the better for this when we want to conjure up pictures and people and recall loved scenes that linger in the memory; and John, to-day, was in a retrospective mood. He desired to live over again some recent events and to talk about them, but not to the trees or the uncertain birds or to himself. His neighbor's dog would answer by the gleam of intelligence in its nutty brown eyes, and then John could frame such replies as

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he knew, or hoped, she would make. What a strange compound is a man in love! He has figured in books for many a century, but who has depicted him as he really is? John was no less himself because of a new feeling; other traits were not forced to the background to make room for this new-comer; but could not all the world see that all else had to stand aside, just a little? Even he thought this might be true, and he would that the world were blind. He was only sure of his own feelings, and in that blessed state of hopefulness as to Ruth that enabled him to think whatsoever best pleased him at the moment; but he also knew the storm that would break over his head if Matthew Watson knew positively he was seriously inclined. "What will come of all this, doggie? Come, now: two pats of your tail on the dead leaves for 'good' and three for 'no good;" but the dog stood up when spoken to, and wagged his tail so rapidly, John could not count. "Well, what does that mean? Is everybody opposed to me, and this means brushing me away. Come, doggie, speak out." And the

dog, moved by John's earnestness, gave a low, quick bark. "That is as much like 'yes' as 'no,' so I'll have to hunt up some witch of the woods to tell me my fortune. Come along!" And with the dog running ahead and sniffing at every tree where a squirrel or opossum might be hiding, John walked on and on, following the winding bluff that overlooked the meadows and creek until he came to the three big beeches where the single Indian family of the immediate neighborhood, an old basket-maker and his squaw, had their wigwam. There was no one about, and John sat at the foot of the largest of the three great trees, and looked out over the meadows and beyond them to the river. A boat with hoisted sail was just entering the creek, and another, heading for Philadelphia, was also well in view. "How this wilderness is changing!" remarked John to himself, as he looked about. "Every month brings newcomers, and they do not all remain in the settlements, but keep pushing farther and farther out into the back country. There is every reason to be hopeful; and what if I

have so little I can call my own, have I not strength enough in these arms to earn more than my own living? They were strong enough on one occasion, and I think have been stronger. Come, doggie, old fellow, it's time we were going, or William will be sounding an alarm, thinking I am lost." And John Bishop laughed in a cheery way as he retraced his steps; and far sooner than he had made the journey from his shop to the three beeches he was back, and never knew that he had missed his dinner and kept the folks waiting and wondering.

"They have been asking after thee, John," William announced as soon as he entered the shop; "thee has not been to thy dinner."

"Oh, I nibbled a beech-nut and tried to solve a problem and—didn't," replied John, cheerfully. "But who has been here? Thee seems to have had company, from the placing of these broken chairs, which were hardly safe to offer heavy guests."

"Martin Nutt and Matthew Watson have been here. Martin called to see thee about

his boat,—the one that plies between here and Philadelphia. He wishes to sell it, and Neighbor Watson has considered the matter and offers to join me in its purchase, and so, if thee still chooses, I will sell my interest in this venture. Thee can readily find a partner or helper, I think. But, John, has thee the money to buy my share?"

"If I had not," John replied, with a trace of anger in his tone and a contraction of the brows full of meaning,—"if I had not, I should not have made the suggestion. But why should I not buy Martin's boat, and let thee keep the shop? I can sail a boat, and thee cannot, and it was Martin's errand to see me, I think thee said."

"It was; but he happened to speak of the matter to Neighbor Watson, and he thought I had better buy it; and then thee knows I have forty—"

"Forty fiddle-sticks! William, I sometimes think thee is almost a dunce, and I'm so tired of hearing of thy forty pounds that I have wanted to have the shop here all to myself. Do follow Neighbor Watson's advice and

buy the boat, and have Matthew join thee. But why does Martin Nutt wish to sell?"

"He is going to Philadelphia to open a ship chandlery and not follow the water any longer. He thinks he has earned the right to be a merchant and have an office, so he said, and Neighbor Watson agreed; and, John, when can thee pay me for my share in this venture?"

"Just as soon as we can get William Emley to draw up the necessary paper and thee signs it the money will be in thy hands," John replied, with a glow of amusement that lit his whole countenance and showed what a handsome man he was.

"But I did not know," remarked his partner, astonished at John's promptness in the matter, and not a little distrustful of the course he was pursuing,—"I did not know that thee had so much in hand; thy capital, I thought—"

"Was the ten pounds I put with thy forty. Well, William, I am not supposed to be responsible for thy way of thinking. Does thee not remember that when we started in

business here that thee wondered where I got the ten, and supposed that I borrowed them from Robert Pearson? And what of the profits of the venture since that day? Does thee suppose I spend a penny every time I make one? Perhaps thee does; but I don't see how it is to be done, with no shops nearer than Burlington. But thy question calls for an answer, perhaps. There is a little oaken box with iron clasps and a lock somewhere, and there's forty pounds and to spare in it, good, honest, silver money that won't burn thy palms when it touches them."

"I am really sorry to leave thee," remarked William, with a vain effort to think over satisfactorily what John had just told him; "but tell me why, if thee had the money, thy share and mine of the venture, when we started here, were not the same. I thought thee had but ten pounds."

"Thee thought so, but I did not tell thee so. I only agreed to put in ten pounds against thy forty, for I thought my knowledge of the

Neighbor Watson, if thee will but remember."

"It must be all proper, I do not doubt, but forty pounds—"

"Well, William, thee has now a chance to receive back thy money, and what has been thy share of the profits of the venture has proved an excellent interest. But thy capital as now invested is worth something more than the original sum now, and I will make a proper agreement with thee when we meet at William Emley's," John replied, assuringly, and his timid partner felt much more as if every penny due him was to be really paid back, but a flood of conflicting impressions so confused the poor fellow he could find nothing to say. He had been in safe hands while with John, and to some extent knew his business, but what of this new venture with all the glittering generalities that Matthew Watson hung about it? He could not feel so sure. William's brain was of oneidea capacity, and now he was forced to battle with a dozen; no wonder he was miserably bewildered.

After a lengthy pause, painful alike to both men, John remarked, "The season will soon be over for thy new trade, what has thee in mind to do while the river is closed?"

"I had not thought of that, and Neighbor Watson did not mention the matter when he and Martin were here," replied William; and he looked greatly distressed, and his fears of a long unoccupied winter were not allayed when John, with a slightly malicious gleam in his eyes, suggested that perhaps he "could board for the dull season with his new partner."

The poor man was more worried than ever. To lose forty pounds of flesh would have given him no particular concern, but to risk, as he might be doing, as many pounds sterling; that was terrible.

"As thee has never consulted with me about thy affairs, William, it is not my province to be thy adviser now; but I never knew thee was accustomed to sail a boat, even small river craft, and the winds on the river are sometimes full of danger, as we have cause to know; and has thee had any teaching in the

matter of general trading? Thee was apprenticed a smith, and can do some things in thy line very well, and I hope to see thee successfully sail the boat that Martin Nutt wishes to sell. Thee knows, of course, that Neighbor Watson cannot help thee in these matters; thee must do all the work."

"But I never even tried to sail a boat; we must have that done by some one who knows how," replied William, becoming more and more thoroughly frightened at the disaster he fancied, with some reason, threatening him.

"Then what will thee do? Sit on the wharf at Philadelphia, while Matthew waits at the ferry?" And John laughed heartily at the picture he drew.

"Thy remarks are unkind, John. Friend Watson would not mislead me," said William, much depressed by his partner's chaffing.

"I would not have thee think that I thought so," replied John; "but really it is thy affair, not mine, and first let us attend to our joint concern. We will send word to William Emley to-morrow and settle this matter of ending our partnership. Then thee

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can have the ready money, so far as it will go, to buy the boat."

"I will go myself to Friend Emley's and make an appointment," said William, "as I cannot lift a hammer or move the bellows now after so much that has worked upon me." And he took up his hat and coat and went out.

"Poor William," remarked John to himself; "but really it is better that I should be alone."

Chapter VIII.

The New Partnership.

THE winter that seemed so distant to William Blake, when the bargain was closed and he and Matthew Watson were the vessel's owners, had set in earlier than usual. The river was filled with floating ice, and it was no longer safe to trust so small a boat as the "Fish-hawk" to the huge masses that, borne by the currents, would soon wear away her sides if exposed to them. The boat must be put in winter quarters, be safely harbored in some little cove on the south bank of the creek; of course, within sight of the Watson house. As his late partner predicted, William Blake was also in winter quarters, with but a single occupation, that of paying his board weekly, and very deep in despair, too, because with no means of earning the requisite number of shillings. Perhaps he did not mean it as unkind, but Matthew Watson had assured

him that the venture was an excellent one; his share of the profits would certainly enable him to pay his board every winter, and that would be a source of anxiety removed, for which he should be thankful.

"Why did thee let me buy the boat?" William often asked of John, for during the long winter days he found the shop a more pleasant place to spend his idle time than at Neighbor Watson's, where business continually called him, as his partner was full of projects that forever called for more of William's money as an offset to the "advantages" Matthew cunningly set forth. "I believe thee could have taken better care of my property than I have done, and thee never even advised me," William often said when they were alone.

"Thee never asked my advice, and I surely could not be expected to intrude it upon thee," John would reply; and then the poor man, who believed himself to have been victimized, would express his fears of his partner's designs, and to all this was added a sorrow of no mean measure, that Ruth would

not favor him with even the briefest conversation when they happened to meet. He had made a great blunder, and would he, John, take him back, if he could prevail upon his present partner to buy his share of the boat and so set him free?

John would not promise, and endeavored to allay his fears, talking extravagantly of the increased trade of the coming season, and how two boats would be needed instead of one. On all subjects John spoke freely, but always without the slightest reference to Ruth. William Blake noticed this in time, and began talking so freely about her that John could no longer escape making a reply. He endeavored first to put a check upon William's volubility, but this was ineffectual. There was, however, one consolation, she was never referred to when others were present. Day after day passed, and finally William more earnestly than ever sought John's opinion. "Thee is well acquainted with Ruth, John, and can tell me, if thee will, why it is she turns from me so. I have always treated her well, and yet she seems very unwilling to

listen to me." John would bite his under lip and look out of the shop window, and when his companion had done speaking, force himself to smile and bid the poor fool remember about faint hearts and fair ladies. This was, of course, wholly unsatisfactory, indeed incomprehensible to him, and he would seek for something more definite, as though John was the ruler of Ruth's destinies.

"Neighbor Watson approves of my suit, I think," William had recently remarked, in the course of a long account of his troubles, and at this assertion John had exclaimed, Oh! so suddenly that William was startled and would have asked endless questions, but his one time partner positively refused to continue the conversation, and forbade the subject being again broached in such a manner that even William could understand, and was henceforth silent on that point.

John Bishop from that morning worked more steadily than before. Never for a moment did his tools lie unused upon the bench or the fire get low. He had hundreds of nails and spikes to make, for there were

two houses to be built in the coming season, and, too, for one of them he was to furnish the crane for the kitchen fireplace, and not a farmer for miles around but had ploughs to be repaired, and many a farmer's wife had sought his skill in fashioning some simple piece of furniture. From morning till night he was busy, and bargained with two good workmen, who were now as steadily occupied as himself. Everywhere was evidence of unusual thrift. William, or any other idler, if he came, soon found himself in the way, and left wondering what had changed John so. The fact is his work had gotten ahead of him, but now he was far ahead of his work. There were no delays now, no broken promises, and in all the dust and smoke John saw Ruth as we often see a bright streak of rosy light piercing a storm-cloud, and the ring of the hammer on the anvil, which meant but thrift to casual ears, was the cheery voice of Ruth, as, wandering by the hedge or strolling over the fields for wild flowers, she sang those simple songs that once heard he could not forget and often found himself humming when alone.

After all, it was not strange that observing people should continually associate John and Ruth in their minds, although so very seldom were they seen together. An aged Friend that day had expressed surprise when she overheard John humming a lively air to himself. "John, I am shocked at thy increasing worldliness. Has thee no greater concern than spending thy time with idle music and the world's follies?"

"Did not David play upon a harp and sing psalms? There was and is nothing particularly worldly about my thoughts at this time. I was thinking of a friend and felt particularly happy, and silence does not suit my heart, which at times must speak out, in what thee called music, but which I take it was hardly that."

"When concerned with the weighty words of Friends who have ministered unto us, would not silence be more fitting?"

John laughed merrily, to the questioner's astonishment. He was not thinking of a Friend of that sort. "I confess, Neighbor Bunting, that I was thinking of one among

us that I have not seen very lately, but she is not a minister."

- "Not Ruth Davenport, John!"
- "Yes, of Ruth."

"John, let me assure thee that thee is greatly on my mind. Ruth is a sore trial to her parents, as thee must know, and I am sad to think of her unless she turns from her worldly ways. Thee is not as constant at meeting as we wish, and it has been long upon my mind to speak to thee. Does Ruth prevent thy coming."

John Bishop came very near getting angry, but Friend Bunting was very aged, and he could only submit to her questioning with apparent excellent grace. Of course it was her right, as an elder, to call his attention to matters concerning the meeting and his relation thereto, but at the same time he did wish she was a man, that he might speak what he really thought. Was it to be his lot to preach a new phase of Christianity? he sometimes asked himself. Well, with Ruth for a helpmeet it would not be so great a hardship as to be forever under the fire of

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criticising neighbors, who sometimes overstepped the mark and encroached upon private concerns. He was getting pretty tired of the whole matter.

"No," he replied, a little curtly, "not Ruth, but my shop. I cannot keep my customers waiting, and must often be absent on Fifth days."

"No occupation would require thy absence from appointed meetings unless thee gave heed to worldly inclination." And with this parting admonition, John was left to his own reflections.

As he walked to his shop, a gorgeous red-bird crossed his path and whistled merrily when perched in a cedar hard by. "What a gay worldling, and whistling too!" exclaimed John. "How I wish Ruth could see and hear this bird!" And he looked in the direction of her home, wondering what she might then be doing. Friend Bunting had made no very deep impression.

While John had been thus engaged, William Blake was on the other side of the creek, and had been engaged in two very mo-

mentous conversations. An unusual amount of bravery had found a lodgement in his breast, and, believing his investment was, if not in doubt, in a bewildering entanglement of claims that his partner had woven about it, he had actually demanded in plain terms why it was that he, William Blake, was paying for everything and yet nothing appeared to be his. It was the most important mental problem he had ever formulated, and his own words staggered him as he pronounced them, one at a time, as if repeating the speech of another. "Thy words, Neighbor Watson, are all fair sounding, but always wind up with the suggestion that I put my hand in my pocket, and never we put our hands in." William Blake that day made the discovery, the only one he ever made, that he was a fool, and could not remedy the trouble.

Matthew Watson was astonished, and then, feeling sure of his position, acted the part of an indignant man. Of course, he could withdraw if dissatisfied, but hardly expect to do so without a loss. He might go to Phila-

delphia or return to England, or remain, that he could decide for himself; or he might find some one who would buy him out, but it must be a person acceptable to him, as he did not wish to be associated with those who were not his co-religionists. Matthew talked in this indifferent, if not heartless way, and put his partner in a steadily more depressing frame of mind, and at last, as usual, overdid William said that he should the matter. ask for a committee investigation, though he really had no grounds for this, for he had not been defrauded, as the world looks upon business transactions, but misled; but the very idea of being closely questioned so frightened Matthew that he did explain and promise to put in writing and satisfy William's friends, and so drove the shadows from the deluded man's brows and put him more at ease; and then Matthew urged him home to dine with him, and as they passed up the lane from the landing to the house, he made William feel as if he was a prosperous ship-owner, and the two shillings he jingled in his pocket were a dozen golden pounds.

William entered the house with a glad heart, and, would wonders never cease, Ruth was as beaming as her step-father had been. For once he was really happy, because full of hope, and, seeking an opportunity, he called Ruth to one side, and in a low tone that was lost on all other ears he laid his fortune at her feet, and would gladly have put himself there also, did Friends' discipline permit of such a proceeding.

Ruth was too astonished to make any reply. This was the first intimation she had had that this rattle-brained youth had ever given her a second thought. What could it mean? Was it the property in England, of which he had, of course, heard, and supposed she would go to claim? A hundred wild ideas rushed through her mind, and, forgetting where she was or who were present, she turned and ran out of doors, down the winding lane, and on and on until out of breath, and then, turning about, ran back again, but not to where she had left William standing in blank amazement, but by him to her mother, and, catching her by the hands,

said, "Mother, is the world coming to an end, as one of our ministers is always predicting? William Blake wants me to marry him."

William Blake looked very much as if he would like to escape if he saw any means of doing so. Ruth's brothers laughed and stared at him. Matthew Watson drummed the toe of one of his heavy boots very distinctly on the bare floor; and then followed a brief but oppressive silence.

Finally her mother spoke, to the relief of the older people present. "Ruth, thee is no longer a child, and should not treat thy friends so strangely. Perhaps thee did not under-

stand what William said."

"I do not think there was a chance for that. No, William, I cannot marry thee. It is very kind to make the offer. Perhaps—"

"Well, Ruth, well!" exclaimed William, with strong hopes filling his breast again.

"Perhaps I may go to England in the spring."

Chapter IX.

The Reply to the Letter.

Several weeks had passed since the arrival of Revell Stacy's letter with its important message to Ruth, but as a reasonable time had been granted for a decision in so important a matter, a final decision had not been reached, and the serious discussion of the subject from time to time postponed, although Matthew Watson was anxious to send a reply, and had improved every opportunity to impress both upon Ruth and her mother the desirability of the former accepting the property on the terms offered by her uncle Timothy, and "remember, Ruth, Revell Stacy does not say that thee can never return to the province."

"Thee has never read me the full text of his letter, and I should be allowed to judge of it by hearing or seeing it," Ruth replied.

Matthew's face flushed as he heard these insinuating words, and he looked steadily at

the blazing fire on the hearth, and then, as a reason for still looking anywhere than at Ruth, knowing her searching eyes were upon him, he poked viciously at the burning sticks and caused a shower of sparks to rush up the wide chimney throat. Not until then could he command himself as thoroughly as he knew was necessary, for Ruth was an antagonist, on occasion, that he really feared. She had too frequently divined his thoughts and without apparent interference thwarted his plans.

"Is it not most unseemly, and before thy brothers, too, to cast a doubt upon my words and intentions? I have told thee an estate is at thy command upon conditions, and what more need thee know? Friend Stacy's letter has other matter that is for my eyes and not thine, and am I not standing in thy father's place?" he asked, with some show of emotion but with more of yexation.

"And perhaps not thinking what would have been my father's thoughts."

"Ruth, Ruth!" exclaimed her mother, with a deprecatory tone.

"Mother dear, with the coming of the spring I shall be eighteen years old, and so expected to speak for myself where I only am concerned, and that is but a short time off. Let me have the privilege now, for the importance of this letter will not admit of more delay. Father has said a decision must be reached, and I agree with him." And then, turning to her step-father, she asked, "Am I to read the letter myself, or is what thee has told me all that I am to know?"

"What I have told thee is all that thee need know, as I have already said to thee."

"Then if I err in judgment from ignorance of the truth, the sin will fall upon thee," Ruth replied, with a trace of anger in her voice.

"Ruth, Ruth, do have greater concern as to thy words. Father should have thy confidence."

"Yes, mother, should have," Ruth replied, in a manner that plainly indicated that he had not.

What seemed a long silence followed, the family all gazing at the fire, the parents with troubled faces, the boys curious and looking

first at one and then another of the three who were so intimately concerned with the subject under discussion.

Finally, Matthew Watson began moving uneasily in his chair and was about to speak, when Ruth, anticipating him, said, "Mother, will thee not decide for me? I have said again and again I would not leave thee, and thee has said I should not go against my will, but there has been a cloud of sorrow resting upon thee ever since the hateful letter came. It has made me a cause of discontent and worry, as father's actions show, and I would be led by those who should speak for me as to my duty. As Friend Bunting has said to others of me, "I am with you but not of you,' and if not as strict a Friend at heart as my parents, is that not my misfortune rather than my fault? Why will thee not decide for me, mother?" asked Ruth, with her voice trembling with emotion.

"Had thee given more heed to the solemn words of our meetings," began Matthew Watson, in his sing-song voice that made most people distrustful of the speaker without

clearly knowing why, "thy mind would not be disturbed—" but Ruth was in no humor to listen to his cant, and cut it short, saying, "I want mother's decision now, and then I can better listen to whatever thee may have to suggest. Do speak, mother," again implored Ruth.

"I cannot, indeed, I cannot," her mother replied, still gazing intently at the fire.

"Thy mother—" again began Matthew Watson.

"Father, this conversation must be between mother and myself. We hold a relation to ourselves with which thee has nothing to do, and I cannot help it if thee is pained by what thee calls my perversity. To go to England means to leave my mother, and she shall decide, and would have decided before this if thee had not so persistently interfered. I can only guess thy wishes from thy guarded words, but it is mother who has to judge of this, not thee. She knew my father, and knows his people well; she can tell me, judge for me. They are world's people, are they not, like the Pearsons?"

"They are not Friends, Ruth, and thy father was disinherited because he became one. They would treat thee kindly, I have no doubt, but thee would not likely remain a Friend; but, Ruth dear, how can I judge in so weighty a matter? Matthew, can thee not lead us to a proper conclusion?" asked Ruth's mother, turning her face towards her husband.

"Mother," spoke up Ruth, quickly, "I will not have father's judgment; I want thine. Did thee not hear what I have said, or will thee not heed thy own daughter's prayer for

guidance?"

Again a long silence followed, and it was well. Calmer thoughts came to each troubled breast, and there was reason to believe that the vexed question would be finally solved. Ruth had changed her position, and now sat on a low stool at her mother's feet, with one arm upon her lap and the other around the neck of her brother, who still sat on the floor unmoved, by the chimney corner, awed by the strange and at times angry discussion he had heard. Seated according to her wishes, and as she had so frequently sat for many

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years, Ruth looked long and lovingly into her mother's face, and then, her eyes brightening and her face that had been drawn and troubled broadening to a sweet smile, she said, "Father, my words were not what they should have been, but my heart was sorely tried; what, if thee will tell me, is thy wish?"

"I have had much concern," her step-father slowly replied, "upon my mind concerning the letter, and given it attention that its importance demands. I have conferred with thy mother and some of our meeting. There is not a unity of thought on the subject, but if thee can find thyself strong enough to remain a Friend, I would advise thy going. Thee is not called upon to change thy faith, and perhaps may be a means of changing others."

As the purport of his reply became evident, Ruth's mother slowly bent over her daughter, until her face nearly touched Ruth's floating wealth of golden hair, and when his last word was spoken, she exclaimed "Ruth!" and began sobbing unrestrainedly.

At that moment there came a loud knock at the door, and even Ruth's mother, who

had for long years held her feeling under complete control, although she sat up and with a quick motion brushed away the tears from her eyes, could not conceal all trace of the intense excitement of the past few moments. Ruth made no effort to conceal her feelings.

Matthew Watson rose and went to the door. As it opened, Robert Pearson entered the room, and, with a courteous greeting to all, remarked in his cheerful way of the splendid weather then prevailing and his disappointment at not seeing him, Matthew, at the meeting about the survey of the new road. Then, seeing that both Ruth and her mother wore most anxious, troubled looks, his whole manner changed, and he asked if any one were ill or had bad news been received.

"Matters of great concern detained me, to my regret," Matthew replied, for he was one who did not wish any public matter to progress without his association with it, and the more prominently, the better he was pleased. He took it as a slight if his opinion was not

always asked and his judgment requested. Robert Pearson saw that family matters had been under discussion, and he judged of their general character, for he had heard from Ruth all that she knew of the Stacy letter. "Goodness, Cousin Anne, you look as sober as an owl, and Ruth isn't much of an improvement over you. I'm almost afraid to mention my errand." By this time the traces of grief were pretty well effaced, and Ruth thought, as she saw her mother's effort to greet her cousin's chaffing with a smile,—

Grief doth quickly come and go; How small a thing is sorrow! To-day 'tis only ill we know, But all goes well to-morrow.

"I hope I have not called at an unfortunate time and interrupted a family gathering."

"No, no, not at all, cousin; what was thy errand?" asked Ruth, hoping it referred to herself.

"It was to ask if Ruth might not return with me. Mrs. Pearson and the girls greatly desire her company, as we have planned a few

simple games and pleasantries for the young folks. You have no objection, I hope." And Robert turned directly to Ruth's mother as he spoke.

Matthew Watson was annoyed beyond measure, but his fear of Ruth, who had finally deferred to his judgment, made him cautious. He waited a moment, and, finding his wife did not reply, said, "I hope, Neighbor Pearson, that thee has not in contemplation any worldliness to further poison Ruth's mind. Her lightness and want of care for spiritual things is a sore trial to us."

Ruth was on her feet in an instant, for she had not wholly risen when Robert entered the room, but a look from him checked her speech.

"As I am in thy house, and in their presence," pointing to Ruth and her mother, "it does not become me to inquire too closely into thy meaning. It sounds like rather a serious charge, this of poisoning Ruth's mind, but it is likely one of those high-sounding phrases so common in your people's mouths, that has very little behind it. Do you not

suppose, though not a Quaker, that I have some care for my honor and that of my own house? Really, the more I see of your faith, as it is sometimes practised, the less I am drawn to it. What do you say, Ruth, would you like to come, and will my good cousin, your mother, consent?"

"If Matthew does not object, I am willing," Anne Watson replied, with a suspicion of doubt in her voice as to how her husband might take her words.

Ruth was again about to speak, but felt that her cousin's eye was upon her, and, looking up, caught from him a glance suggesting caution if not silence on her part; but she was too excited not to speak out, and, with fire on her tongue, was about to express her opinion of her step-father, when Robert's pleading look restrained her, and she said, so mildly that Robert laughed, "I will come, gladly; when do they expect me?"

"They hoped that you would return with me, so can you not say, 'I will go,' instead of 'I will come'? Then I shall have the pleasure of your company, and we will make

the old oaks ring at the bend in the road and hide behind them when the girls come tearing down to meet us."

The two Watson boys stared as if frightened as Robert Pearson spoke in his cheery way, and the thought vaguely crossed their young minds, what good times the world's people have, and why is it so wicked?

"Father," said Ruth, as she was about to leave the house, "thee may write to Revell Stacy and say that I accept the conditions and will come as soon as I can." She did not look at her mother as she spoke; indeed, she dared not; but after pausing at the door a moment, she returned and kissed her, without speaking.

Chapter X.

Ruth and her Cousin.

Ruth's mother and Robert Pearson were second cousins, and about the same age, but he seemed to every one much younger than he really was. It was not altogether by chance that Matthew Watson had located where he did when he came to America. He had heard from his wife of her cousin Robert's flourishing condition. How with but a mere remnant of a wrecked fortune he had come to West Jersey, and now, in a few years, had become a substantial man of af-He had preceded the Watsons several years, and, fond of company and partial to his own kin, had been very urgent, when he heard of their arrival at Philadelphia, that they should take up the tract of land that was separated in part from his own by the creek. He had succeeded in carrying his point, and Mat-

thew Watson had had no fault to find. Nothing had been misrepresented, and in every business relation Robert Pearson had been pre-eminently just and considerate, but soon a strained feeling arose that nothing could overcome. Robert was not a Friend, and had never realized what was the full purport of Quaker principles until he had met Matthew, who unfortunately represented much more than the tenets of George Fox called for. He had found beneath the plain coat and broadbrimmed hat abundant evidences of our common nature. He had found that both Quakers and Churchmen had like weaknesses, and learned too, to his surprise, that the latter were considered legitimate game of the former. There was an elasticity of conscience occasionally exhibited that at first disgusted and then amused. Matthew could do that which would benefit himself, but could not repeat it for the benefit of another. In short, Robert Pearson looked upon him as a fraud, but said nothing in public; the public looked upon him as a wonderful man and were never tired of shouting his praises.

As in all such cases, the whole truth was never quite laid bare.

As Ruth grew to womanhood, Robert had watched her career with great interest and encouraged in every way her friendship with his own daughters, who were younger than she. It was a red-letter day to him when he discovered by mere chance the interest that she had excited in John Bishop's breast; for Friend though he professed to be, John was a Quaker of a different type, and recent events had made him more and more the friend of Robert. It was the latter who had. while keeping in the background, urged the dissolution of the partnership with William Blake, and since then had aided John in purchasing a small plantation adjoining his own, a hundred acres of upland and meadow that partly laid between the Pearson and Watson tracts.

As the day was fine and the walking excellent, Ruth and Robert were in no hurry to reach the Pearson house; they strolled rather leisurely along; so deliberately, in fact, that Ruth thought there was a purpose in it, and

finally said, "What is on thy mind, cousin? Thy gayety, that made the boys stare when we left the house, has all gone. Has thee repented of thy bargain already to see me to thy house? I know the way and can go unattended without risk. There are no drunken Indians lurking in the woods, I suppose." And Ruth looked archly at Robert, who still maintained a sobering silence.

"Well, cousin," Ruth again remarked, after they had gone some distance, "if thee doesn't speak soon I shall turn back."

"I was thinking, Ruth; and let me ask," said Robert at last, "was there anything serious going on when I called, or is it none of my business? I have noticed that your stepfather has been very self-occupied of late, much more so than usual, and gives less attention to the affairs of the province, to every one's surprise."

"Why, don't thee know? I am offered a fortune if I will go back to England and stay there with my cousins. Uncle Timothy has done this, and I don't know whether I am glad or not. To-day, thee knows, I said I would

go, but poor mother—" And Ruth did not dare go on, her voice rapidly failing her.

"I have heard something of it, as has everybody in the township, but nothing very definite, and have been waiting for particulars, without caring to ask any pointed questions. Now, do please tell me all about it, if it is no secret," urged Robert. And she gave him all the details, so far as she knew them.

"That's very strange," her cousin remarked when she finished her story. "You should insist upon seeing the letter."

"It would be of no use to insist. He may have hidden or burnt it, for all I know."

"That is not likely, and others might prevail where you could not," Robert suggested.

"Then he might blame mother and worry her still more. No, no, don't do that." And Ruth showed she was frightened at the mere suggestion.

"Then I would not go," said Robert, impatiently.

"But I have promised now to do so, and

what else can I do, as he is urgent, and mother—" And here again Ruth's voice trembled too much to speak further.

"Come, come, Ruth, don't bother about it." And, quickening his steps, Robert looked about him and said, "I believe it is going to snow."

The sky was then overcast with one dull leaden cloud, and by the time they had crossed the creek and were following the winding path through the oak woods on the creek's north shore feathery flakes began to fall. Faster and faster they came, so that the air was filled with them when Ruth and her cousin reached the Pearson house.

Robert had not announced their coming, as he had proposed, and, stopping a moment at the gate before they entered the little kitchen door-yard, said, "Ruth, do not speak of this letter from England to the folks here, please, and let me think the matter over for you. There may be something behind it all you know nothing about."

"Why, cousin, what do you mean?" asked Ruth, with a puzzled look.

"I cannot explain now, but trust me. I am as much thy friend as thy step-father—"

What more Robert was about to say will never be known. While he was speaking, a jaunty titmouse clung to a drooping branch of the elm that towered above them and clearly whistled, "Sweet here! sweet here!"

"Take a hint from that little bird, Ruth. Don't you know what it says? It's 'sweet here,' and I hope you'll find it so. There are the girls now, looking out of the window. Come, let's go in."

Ruth quite forgot her cares, doubts, and general conflict of emotions when with the Pearsons. Kindly greeted by the girls' mother and smothered in kisses by the girls themselves, she made one great effort to swallow the lump that was rising in her throat and succeeded. Everywhere in the house there was sunshine, though now so gloomy out of doors, and she could have kissed the grinning slaves, Rebecca and Hagar, she was so happy. Every reasonable means of enjoyment, even to a few books, had been provided, and the Pearsons were accustomed to discuss every

political feature of the province, and selected by his agent in town what little current literature drifted to Philadelphia; for Robert had always found shillings to spare when there was a book to be bought. These volumes were ever an attraction to Ruth, who had been taught to read and write by her mother, but with no other books in the house than those that treated of their religious society. "No Cross, no Crown" had been her spellingbook, and was now in use again as her brother's "reader." Matthew Watson had a mutilated copy of the Bible. It had originally been a portly volume carefully bound in leather, with elaborately tooled edges and corners and with ornate brass clasps. Besides the Old and New Testaments, there had been the order of Common Prayer, the Apocrypha, and the whole Book of Psalms, collected into English metre. All these had been cut out and destroyed, except a few pages of the rhymed version of the Psalms. These Ruth had found and most carefully concealed. To read them was one of her stolen pleasures, and from them she had received her earliest

impressions of poetry, and soon began making little verses for her own amusement. In later years she had heard at Pearson's portions of Shakespeare read aloud, and when she had ventured to read a little for herself, the world seemed everywhere so full of meaning, except in her step-father's house. Here at Pearson's, too, her education had been advanced and her faculties quickened by the judiciously narrated history of her own times and those troublous ones that preceded it, told by Robert's mother, now a very aged woman with weakened body, but with mind and memory unimpaired.

It is true, her mother had made Ruth's life a most pleasant one while she was yet a child, and now the boundless love of the daughter for her mother made Ruth's life far from irksome while at home, but in spite of it all there was a constant longing for a wider outlook that could not be repressed; and the failure to discover that wickedness reputed among the "world's people," as all non-Quakers were called, had made her sceptical concerning the wisdom embodied in Fox's

Journal and Barclay's Apology. "There may be less soberness, mother," Ruth had been heard to say, "but I have not yet heard indiscreet speaking. There is laughter continually, but it is like the songs of the birds to which thee loves to listen. Father is like a sturdy tree that grows in the forest; my young cousins are like the wild roses that grow beneath the windows, and, mother, did not the Lord make them both?"

Ruth's mother scarcely suppressed a faint smile and merry twinkle in her eyes when thus questioned, but her husband's step was heard, and she had but time to reply, "Thee is too young yet, Ruth, to understand these things. Be careful that thy words do not prove a wile of the adversary."

"Does thee mean thy cousin Robert is the evil one?" she whispered, and then, kissing her mother, darted away before her step-father could cast a shadow over them.

The storm was raging without, but not an intimation of it crossed the Pearson threshold. There was abundant warmth and light in the grand old kitchen, and the walls, to

the outermost corners of the sitting-room, were aglow, reflecting the forked tongues of flame that leaped from the hickory logs piled upon the andirons. There had been game after game, from sunset until now, an hour after supper, when fortune-telling had been proposed, and Ruth was to personate a gypsy queen. No one could do it better. She knew the whims and fancies of the young folks present, and made all happy by her witty suggestions of each applicant's future. Then, when there was little left to be said, she remarked, "But nobody has told me mine!"

"Let me do so," suggested Robert Pearson; and, taking his stand near Ruth, said, looking at the palm of her extended hand,—

"An excellent fortune shall be thine,
But not from across the sea.
It awaits thee now, if I read the sign,
My pretty Quaker fairie."

All laughed heartily, except Ruth. Her cousin's conversation before they had entered the house recurred to her, and what could he mean by hinting of the letter now? This

sobered her for a moment, and then she, too, laughed, saying, "Thank thee, Cousin Robert." As she spoke, she looked towards the door, for some one was coming in. It was John Bishop.

Coming forward, he shook hands with Ruth and said, "I trust Friend Pearson is no false prophet. What is thy view of the matter? I did not know of thy expectations from across the sea, except a vague rumor, until William Blake told me this afternoon."

"What, pray, has William been telling thee, John?" asked Ruth, not aware that John still held her hand.

"That thee is to return to England very soon, and he is to accompany thee. He did not know the latter part of these strange tidings himself until thy brothers told him. It seems they overheard thy parents talking of the matter, and Friend Watson is desirous that William should sell his share of the boat to him, or let him act as his agent, and return to England with thee."

This sudden breaking of the news in the Pearson household caused all present to

gather about Ruth and John, and there was naturally a babel of questioning and expressions of disapproval and regret. Ruth stood the ordeal wonderfully well, but John was much chagrined to find that he had unwittingly published what was in some measure a secret. But he did not deserve the blame he put upon himself. He had not been cautioned in any way, and then had not Robert referred to it in the fortune-telling? Besides, how was he, still a young man, and desperately in love, to keep wakeful guard forever on his tongue? He had called this very night to say a word or give a look that Ruth might interpret, for he had seen her pass near his shop that day on her way to Pearson's, and he knew she had not returned.

Robert Pearson looked troubled for the time, and then said, rather loudly, to show that he meant it for all, "When we see a great smoke there is likely to be some fire at the base of it, and so with Ruth. An old uncle has left her something, but all tied up in conditions, and so perhaps not worth going after. I for one won't let her go after

it, if I can help it, when there's many a stout lad in the province that would only be too glad to lay all he had at her feet."

"Cousin, cousin!" cried Ruth, her face red as a rose; and, putting her hands to her ears, she ran out of the room.

The young people ran after her, and Robert, turning to John, touched him upon the arm and said, "Let's go into the kitchen and smoke our pipes. I want to say a word about this matter." And seated there, in comfortable chairs, Robert told John all that he knew of Ruth's affairs, and added, "I believe it is an ugly business and should be thwarted." Then, after a pause, for John could make no reply, so confusing were his thoughts, Robert said, "Have you spoken to Ruth?"

"About what?"

"Why, about yourself." And Robert laughed heartily. "Man alive! everybody knows you are in love, and I for one am glad to know it. Why else did you talk to Bunting's old hound in that queer way some time ago? You didn't know, of course, there was an eavesdropper about, but there

was. Well, speak to her your very first chance, for I'm sure she likes you, and then it will give her a chance to punish you for interfering with her bathing." And Robert laughed again.

"I will be guided by your advice, Friend Pearson," replied John, and might have said more, but was interrupted by Robert's re-

mark,-

"Please call me by my name. I have seen just a little too much of this 'Friend this' and 'Friend that' to altogether like it."

"But I am a Friend," John replied, with a broad smile lighting his pleasant face.

"Yes, but of another sort."

"Good-night, father; good-night, Neighbor Bishop," was heard from the head of the stairs. "Ruth's going to bed, and so are we. Good-night."

So John saw no more of Ruth; but when, an hour later, he went out into the storm, it was with so many pleasant thoughts, that he scarcely noticed that it was still storming.

Chapter XI.

The New Year.

As the older people of the Crosswicks Valley found, and the younger element, in later years, too discovered, the nominally long winter drew all too rapidly to a close. Everywhere there was a hint of the coming spring. Noisy blackbirds hovered over the marshy meadows; starlings whistled from the willow hedges; even the song sparrows in Watson's gooseberry hedge sang so cheerfully that Ruth's mother often stopped to listen, and her husband, busy out of doors, seeing his wife bareheaded, at an open door or window, wondered if she were calling him and he had not heard, and so asked if he were wanted, in those harsh tones that silenced every sparrow and caused his wife, after a vigorous negative shake of the head, to shut the door or window in despair.

It was the beginning of the year, and

Matthew Watson was stirring in the matter of taking advantage of the first open water to have the boat begin her trips to and from Philadelphia. Through the winter he had talked much with William Blake in glittering generalities, but thought and planned more with himself, down to the minutest details. In spite of the golden future he set forth to his partner, there lingered a feeling of distrust on William's part, and he was ready to sell out at any time, if not at a loss; and Matthew's propositions all required some sacrifice.

Worn almost to illness and wholly despairing of gaining the affections of Ruth, William thought seriously of his partner's suggestion to return to England with her, and who knows what change might take place in the girl's mind when away from all her old acquaintances but him. Matthew Watson had hinted of this and of leaving him as his agent in the boating business. He could then speak of his investments in America, Matthew had suggested, and the words had a charm for William's weak mind that was powerful if not quite overpowering. Should he sell or make

such arrangement as had been suggested? His own efforts to solve a problem were always futile, and he sought John Bishop's advice; but there he could get no satisfaction. It was not an easy question to answer, and why not seek some prominent man of affairs; why not consult William Emley or Thomas Lambert? If distrustful of his partner, why not sell out, even at a loss? for it was worth something to be rid of worry. This last bit of advice was lost on William. however. What transpired after his last visit to John's shop William did not tell, but a bargain was reached, and he was for the second time free to come and go and to invest his steadily diminishing capital.

So the days passed. There was activity both within doors and without, for Ruth had to make her preparations for the journey, and her mother was busied about it too whenever her ordinary household duties would permit; but "why do this and why that?" her mother often asked. "Can thee not get better suited when thee gets home?" And her voice would always change at the utterance of that last

word; so much so that Ruth had learned to expect it, and would try to kiss her mother before it was spoken.

"But don't thee know, mother, I am to be so busy there converting my cousins? Father says that I may be the instrument of a great change among my people; but really, has thee ever discovered any converting tendencies in me? Father's words are not always in accord, for he has charged me with perverting others by my example. Oh, dear! I do wonder what England is like." And Ruth would go on steadily with her needlework, and if she looked up from it, her eyes would wander but in the one direction.

"What does thee think, mother," Ruth asked one day, "of my plan of having John make me two small oaken chests to hold all my worldly possessions? I want them made of oak from the creek's north shore, and he can use the brasses that are on the old chest in the garret that got so badly broken on shipboard when we came over."

"The chest, dear, is not so badly broken but it can be mended, so father says, and one,

even if large, would be better suited to thy needs than two, and John has scarcely time for such work now."

"He has fully two weeks, and it is his trade, mother, and why not humor me since I am so soon to leave thee? I still have those silver shillings that thee has said were always mine, and I feel as if I ought to begin to be a woman of affairs and make my own purchases."

"Thee is a strange child, Ruth, and I am much concerned for thee, but I see no serious reason why thee should not have this whim, as thee calls it, carried out. Why does thee not ask father? and if he thinks proper, let him speak to John."

"Will the time never come when I can speak myself to John without the whole province raising its eyebrows? Wherever I go it is John, John, John; not shouted at me, but it might as well be, for that is the meaning of the noddings and smiles and wise looks of everybody in Chesterfield and Nottingham. I wish this same 'everybody' was just one person, and John would give him or it a ducking in

Crosswicks Creek." And Ruth's eyes flashed as she gave this full expression to her feelings.

"Ruth dear, I am astonished at thy words."

"So am I. Bother these words; they are none of them strong enough, and I dread to shock thee with some of the words of the world's people. Just for half a day how I would like to be a man and swing my arms right and left among some of the gatherings about the old oak in the meeting-house yard. I never heard a syllable, but it always seems to me, judging from appearances, that every group is gossiping about Ruth and John—John and Ruth."

Her mother could not repress a smile, although she tried to look serious. A good deal of her old self was welling up to the surface, but she said, "Has it never occurred to thee, Ruth, that thee might be giving more thought to thyself than others do concerning thee? Are we not too apt to hold ourselves at more than our real value? I think I have seen the world enough to say it is a common failing."

"True, mother; but there's a difference-"

"Ah! Ruth, each of us holds herself as the exception to everything undesirable."

"But, mother," Ruth insisted, "there is a difference. I do not concern myself with my neighbors, and why should I be singled out as the target for all their gossipy arrows? Would it not be more fitting, if I must be criticised, for the Friends to wait until I have really done something terrible, or—or—well—well, until John Bishop asks me to marry him? I wish he would."

"Why, Ruth!" exclaimed her mother, in astonishment.

"Yes, I wish he would; for then I could give him an answer that would end this tattle."

"But would thee, Ruth?" asked her mother, recovering from the shock of her daughter's strange declaration.

"Would I, mother? Why, how can I tell until he asks?" And then, leaving the little rocking-chair, she took a stool and placed it at her mother's feet, and taking her mother's hands in her own, rested her head upon them, and sang in a low voice,—

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Oh, for the laddie with merry een,
The laddie I greet when I gae
For a walk i' the field; 'twas so yestreen,
His words were as music to me.

Oh, for this laddie with dark-brown hair And skin that is kissed by the sun; Oh, when shall it be his love he'll declare, Oh, when can I call him my own?

Oh, for this laddie, who knows no fear;
With him, hand in hand, to the end
I would walk, all my days a-laughing at care,
Then die in the arms of my friend.

Then for almost an hour they sat as they were, neither speaking.

Matthew Watson had gone to Burlington and the boys were out of hearing. Ruth and her mother knew that they were free from interruption, and it is not strange that they should have been so superlatively happy. The thought of their soon parting did not trouble the mother for the moment, and the daughter seemed never to give it a second thought. She treated it like some ordinary occurrence, and so had roused her mother's

curiosity. Never again might there be such an opportunity for mutual confidences.

"Ruth dear, tell me, what is thy feeling

towards John?"

"Why, didn't I tell thee in my little song? That is what I meant to do. I love him, mother."

"Has he ever spoken to thee of this?"

"No, mother, but I can read his thoughts; and oh, if I should misread them!" And Ruth drew a long breath and pressed her hands to her heart.

"Why, Ruth, what is the matter? asked her mother, much impressed by such a violent gesture.

"Was thee ever young thyself? Why does thee ask?"

"Then, dear, what will thee tell him, if he should ask thee, before thee goes away?"

"That he must go away too."

"But thy cousins in England would scarcely approve of John; he is not of thy father's rank in life, and they account such things of much importance, as I learned when thy father—"

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"Do, mother, let us talk of something else. Thee has sought my confidence and I have given it. If John asks me to marry him, I shall say, 'I will,' and will hold to my promise, if it means giving up that fortune over there and coming back, and I wish it would. Better John with what he can acquire than what Uncle Timothy has left me with an 'if.' But, mother, suppose any one should have heard our conversation, wouldn't tongues be wagging all over Chesterfield?" And Ruth laughed merrily as she thought of such a thing happening. "I shall write a message on a slip of birch bark to save paper, and send it to John by the boys. I'll find out, at least, if he can make them."

"Had thee not better let father attend to this?" asked her mother.

"Decidedly not, mother. Let me have my own way this time."

"This time?" repeated her mother. "Has it not always been so?"

The note was written, the boys called from their play and sent upon the errand of delivering it to John. They were not gone

long, and brought back with them the reply: Dear Ruth,—There is no mention of the size desired, and the brasses of one large chest will hardly fit two small ones. Shall I call for particulars?—J. B.

Ruth laughed at the indefiniteness of her note, and while debating with herself as to the desirability of writing another and more explicit note, she saw John Bishop approaching the house.

"After the boys left," he said, on entering the house, "I thought to save thee trouble I had better come directly for the necessary directions. Of course I can make the chests,

but I am puzzled about the old brasses."

"Oh dear, father is not home, and I do not know that I can have them. Never mind; I will use the old chest, which mother says can be mended. It was a foolish notion that I had of having two small chests instead of one that is large enough to hold all I've got and me too; at least this side of the ocean."

"What does thee think of Ruth's returning to England, John?" asked Ruth's mother,

at the same time watching his countenance closely as he listened and replied.

"I have scarcely given it a thought, Neighbor Watson."

"Well!" exclaimed Ruth; "that is not very flattering, I must say; but then we are not supposed to make pretty speeches about each other."

John looked a little confused, but quickly caught himself and said, "Surely I am very sorry. Perhaps she will return to thee one of these days. I do not believe our old homes will be as attractive to her as these newer ones that we have here. Ruth cannot remember England, surely."

"Oh, no, and I don't care to go back, either, even on a visit. It's a case of necessity, it seems, that I wish had not arisen."

The idea of the new chest was abandoned with a promptness that made Ruth's mother wonder if it had been but an excuse on her daughter's part to have John call. This was not a generous view to take nor a correct one, and the girl would have been furious had she thought her mother entertained it

for an instant; but circumstances did point that way. John, too, was surprised at the sudden abandoning of the plan, and, seeming to have no further reason for staying, bade them farewell in the formal fashion of the day. But Ruth walked with him to the door, and as he was about leaving the threshold, upon which he paused for a moment, she said, in a subdued tone that was not natural to her, "I am sorry, John, that I gave thee so much trouble."

"Sorry? Ruth, don't let such a trifle as that annoy thee. I am sorry I cannot be of any use to thee. So it is really settled that thee is going away." And John as he spoke looked directly into her eyes.

"Oh, yes, it has been settled for some time; but I do wish William Blake was not going in the same ship."

"Had I not better go too, to keep William from worrying thee?" asked John, trying hard to smile, but too much in earnest.

He had asked a question in mingled fun and seriousness to which she must reply, but how could she without opening up to him

her whole life? She bit her lower lip until it almost bled to restrain her feelings. In another moment she would have precipitately fled, but John caught her hands and said, in a manner that meant everything, "Ruth."

"Yes, John," she whispered, with eyes brighter than he had ever seen them, and then withdrawing her hands, turned away.

John Bishop walked with lighter steps than he had ever done. The hills, the trees, the creek, his shop, all the world was wrapped in a new light. Ruth's mother, standing by the window, saw him go, and said, as her daughter came to her side, "John walks as if thee had given him pleasant tidings."

"Mother, I have given him my heart."

Chapter XII.

Straightening the Lines.

ROBERT PEARSON and John Bishop were so frequently seen together that it was but a short time before gossip had made them its victims, and the women were all agog to know what it meant, and John was always absent from Fifth day meetings and with his wits in the clouds on First day. He was a changed man, it was commonly said, and of course because led astray by the worldly Robert Pearson. Both men heard rumors to this effect, and let them pass unheeded. There was a steady growth in the population, and that was worth considering, and ship-loads of new-comers were soon expected. Such facts made them busy men, and, eminently practical, they foresaw the increased value of their lands and were ready to increase their acreage as opportunity afforded. The creek was the only water-way leading to Philadelphia, and the roads were of little use. Better shipping

facilities should be provided. Whenever John could spare the time he and Robert were to be seen passing and repassing the ground, and they had kept William Emley pretty busy in surveying. For their own advantage, whether they proposed to retain or sell, it was decided by them that the whole region should be replotted, and various metes and bounds more definitely fixed. matter, which far more concerned Robert with his thousand acres than John with his hundred, it became necessary to consult with Matthew Watson, for to exactly define the limits of his tracts along the creek and those of Robert Pearsons was no easy matter; but Matthew was suspicious, and claimed he knew just how his property lay, and Robert ought to, as its former owner; and was not every foot of it recorded in Revell's Book of Surveys? What more did he need or could any one ask?

"The cost will be but trifling," Robert urged, "and a general resurvey of this whole valley with its tracts of marsh will prevent disputes that may arise in the future. Do

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you see that great ash-tree at the bend of the stream? Is it on your land or mine? Is it a boundary tree?"

"It is my corner, where it abuts against Hutchinson's land."

"So I supposed you'ld say. If you'll read the deed over again, you'll find it's the small ash twenty feet to the westward that marks the line. Freshets have carried off monuments, winds have uprooted trees, and if you wanted to put up a fence, you would be puzzled in the particulars, if right in a general way. I have induced John to buy the Hutchinson marshes, for some day, if ditched and banked, they will become excellent pasture, and what he does not buy I will take myself. We have seen the proprietor and agreed upon the price."

"Why was I not consulted?" asked Mat-

thew, impatiently.

"About what,—our business?" replied Robert. "And since when have you shown such friendly interest in our affairs as to wish to advise with us? Really, Friend Watson, your manner is a puzzle to me. Would

you have bought the unsurveyed tracts that have been begging for a purchaser since you came to the country? Before the passing of the deeds we purpose having the tract again surveyed, and the new survey compared with the old, and if our neighbors will not join us, John and I will form ourselves into a meadow improvement company, and perhaps some day startle the valley with a project to build wharves, deepen the channel, and generally cause a peaceful revolution. This is not a mere boast or an over-statement, John, do you think?"

"It is the subject of our thoughts of late, certainly, and is, I trust," said John, turning directly to Matthew Watson, "a proper concern for me. As the Friends in this township and in Nottingham so greatly outnumber all others, is it well that they should take no interest in the general betterment of our estates? You that have families should surely consider the welfare of those who have been intrusted to your care."

"Quite a sermon," whispered Robert, with a sly nudge that Matthew did not notice.

"I am inclined to thy views, John," Matthew deigned to admit; "but my surprise is that thee did not consult with Friends before entering upon such an enterprise. It was my advice, I think, that led thee to establish thy shop."

"Oh!" exclaimed Robert Pearson, with his eyes turned skyward, thinking, "Is that a sample of a Friend's veracity?" For it was he, and he alone, who had brought John Bishop and William Blake together.

"Well, Neighbor Watson, we cannot stand all the day idle, you know. John and I have an engagement, and will carry out our plans without you. The weather is superb, the meadows dry for a wonder, the frost is all gone, and yet it is but the middle of the month. The shop is in good hands, John's help being a very skilful man."

"Thee may be as rash as thy fancy that the winter is over; there will be snow and sleet yet." And Matthew turned away, glad, it would seem, to say something disagreeable in reply to Robert's abounding cheerfulness.

It was a splendid afternoon. The whole

earth seemed upon the point of awakening. There was warm sunshine, a clear blue sky, the winding creek, now almost free from ice and glittering like polished gold; and everywhere faint traces of green showed in the sheltered nooks, where the warmth of the sun was held as one might hold water in the hollow of the hand. The air, the trees, the leafless shrubbery, alike were filled with birds. Over the meadows gathered the redwings fluting merrily; the grakles in the tall trees spluttered and croaked, as though they were hoarse from overmuch rejoicing; the wildfowl, returning from the south, curved in and out among the scattered trees that bordered the creek's crooked channel, and whistled and chattered where they gathered in the shallow pools that dotted the marshes. Everywhere in the broad landscape there was abundant evidence of life, and above all other sounds rose the deep rattle of myriad frogs. Robert, loving more and more the wide landscape that had been so long familiar to him that it had entered into his daily life, touched John upon the arm and said, " Is this not beautiful?

Do you remember a prettier scene in old England?" And without waiting for a reply continued: "And then to think, John, it is our home. What comfort in the thought we are not subject to the whims of a landlord, eh?" And Robert waved his arms about him, as if he would embrace the nearest tree and kiss it.

John smiled at his enthusiasm, but his thoughts were running in another channel. "If I mistake not, there comes Ruth; is she going to thy house?"

"I suppose so from the direction she is going; and that reminds me, John, have you taken my advice?"

John's face grew very red and he tried to turn the conversation, but Robert saw his aim and diverted it. "I believe you have, and she has not said thee 'nay,' or you wouldn't get so fiery red. Remember, John, I have a right to speak since our last conversation. But what of this plan of her going back to England for a fortune?" asked Robert, with a sneering tone as he spoke the last words. "Will you go with her?"

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"How can I, with all these ventures in land upon my hands? I have hopes yet that she will not go; but if she does, I shall have to go after her and bring her back."

"If I can prevent it, she shall not go," said Robert, with an emphasis suggestive of

an oath.

- "But how can thee?" John asked, with much interest.
 - "How old is Ruth?"
 - "Eighteen in Third month next."
- "Not eighteen until May; that's bad," said Robert, thoughtfully.
 - "Why, may I ask thee?"
- "Until then she is a child and must obey her parents."

"Obey her mother, I suppose. Has Matthew any legal right over her?"

"His having supported her all these years would give him right, I suppose, but not if Ruth's mother had something from her first husband and she has supported Ruth, and I think that is the case. It would be an ill-judged step to interfere, but if Ruth will join us, if she really loves you and you her, why

not circumvent Neighbor Watson? Plots and counter-plots, eh, John? Why, it is like reading a play of the olden time. We were going to straighten some lines in the meadows to-day; let us see if we cannot straighten some of the lines in Ruth's life and yours, John. Come, let's step about and join Ruth before she reaches my lane, or the girls will see her coming and you'll have no chance to get in a word." And Robert took John by the arm and they hurried in a new direction, the former full of the new plan and eager as a boy for the bloodless fight, while the latter had ideas in plenty, but just now in a bewildering state of confusion.

Chapter XIII.

A Visit to Burlington.

EARLY in the day, while a chilling fog rested over the landscape and the candles were yet burning in the kitchen of the Watson homestead, a negro brought a horse to the door, saddled, and with a leathern pack also upon the horse's back; and after waiting for a few moments he was relieved of his charge, and Matthew Watson, mounting the patient beast, turned its head towards the public road and was soon out of sight. His destination was Burlington. The road was a long and lonely one, and the recent thawing weather had made the way so muddy and yielding that it would be well towards night before he arrived at that flourishing town by the river. Matthew's purpose was, if possible, to secure passage for Ruth on one of the two ships that had been lying there all winter; and having transacted that important matter,

he would return promptly, or failing, would, if necessary, keep on his journey to Philadelphia.

Many were the errands he had been charged with by his wife and boys, for the journey to town was an undertaking of some magnitude, involving an expenditure of both time and money; but Matthew was not given to bothering about trifles, as he called much of everybody's business but his own. "I trust I shall find Friend Gardiner at home, for he can best aid me in my concern to secure a proper vessel," he said to himself; "if it was only the other way, there would be no difficulty. Still, there are Friends returning in almost every ship, and William will be on board." Say what he would to himself. Matthew did not find the outlook a pleasant one. What if she were the only woman on board? And with this thought the man's stern features sterner grew. He was taking a fearful responsibility on himself, and he knew it, and why? Because he had failed to make of Ruth a prim, spiritless Quakeress, blind to about all that makes a life worth

living. A dull, grasping animal himself, nothing akin to pleasure ever cast a ray upon his mind that was not physical rather than intellectual. His occasional remarks in meeting had no bearing on his own life; but his interests lay in his standing with the people with whom his life had been thrown, and his religion and his interests were so inseparable as to be practically one. Ruth had been a thorn at times in his flesh, and yet his smothered sense of justice had forced him often to admit to himself that her views of life were neither irrational nor irreligious; but they were not the views of Friends, and his own judgment must not weigh. He could scarcely be Friend Watson and a controlling spirit in meeting and yet have a worldling in his family. William Blake had a little property, and could he but bring about her marriage, then his responsibility would cease, and he could control William if he lived in the neighborhood; then, too, the cost of her maintenance would no longer fall upon her mother. What a piece of good fortune this opportune letter of Revell Stacy's, that

made his way plain and provided for Ruth! But Matthew was troubled lest his motive in withholding the letter should yet be discovered. "It is my judgment that it is best for her," he continually assured himself, and all the while his "inward voice" that he had been known to preach about told him he was not to that extent "his brother's keeper." It was Ruth who was left to judge. To suit his own distorted views of duty he dared defy law and justice and decide for her. There was a passage in the letter he dared not let her read. Had he done so, she would have reached a different conclusion.

At times as he rode along, meeting no human being and so communing continually with himself, his fears almost overcame him, and he would check the horse's progress; but then the thought would come, to return would be to make known the truth, and the meeting would stand aghast at the grievous sin of one of their leaders. "It must be that my judgment is correct," he would mutter, and then, bolstered by the sound of words he uttered and vainly tried to believe,

he pressed forward towards the town. It was a tiresome, lonesome, dispiriting journey, and Matthew dreaded to make known, in a garbled way, his errand when he reached his destination. Might he not contradict himself; might he not seem unduly anxious and possibly rouse suspicion in the minds of Friends?

This was too much for his stubborn pride, and he exclaimed, "Nonsense; whoever questioned me or my motives?" And with renewed confidence in himself he shifted his position, looked out upon the world instead of at his horse's neck, and rode on with more of the appearance of an upright man.

While the sun was setting back of the Pennsylvania hills Matthew Watson rode into Burlington, and, having found shelter for his horse, wended his way to Thomas Gardiner's and became his guest for the night.

The affairs of meeting, of the province, every topic that he could think of, was duly discussed, and not until the other members of the family had retired did Matthew mention the main purpose of his visit. The "Shield"

and "Welcome" were still at Burlington, he had learned, and did Friend Gardiner think that passage for a young woman could be had upon either vessel? "Is she alone?" asked Thomas; "if so, it would not be possible. There are so few people that return, and particularly at this time of the year, that boats take merchandise only on the homeward passage. That a young woman should go with but the crew on board would not be proper, nor, indeed, would the captain of either vessel assume the responsibility of such a charge. And who, may I ask, is this young woman that would return?"

"My step-daughter, Ruth Davenport,"

Matthew replied.

"Ruth Davenport return to England!" exclaimed Thomas, in blank amazement. "And why must she go? Why, she has been with thee since an infant."

"Her uncle Timothy has left her property." And Matthew gave him the same information he had given others.

Friend Gardiner listened attentively, and then, after some minutes spent in silent reflec-

tion, deliberately replied, "I should think out of thy abundance thee might well maintain Ruth until she married, as she likely will do, and give her a portion then. She must be as a daughter to thee after all these years, and thee has no daughter of thy own. I am amazed at thy eagerness to have her go."

"But Ruth is not a Friend, as I would wish, and her worldliness is a sore trial to me. I had thought that the Friends in Yorkshire might prevail upon her, and she become an instrument in the welfare of her cousins. Thee may know the Davenports are worldly

people."

"I cannot follow thee, Matthew, in thy reasons. Were she my child or step-child, she should not return, unless with me; but if thee is fixed in thy resolve, and Ruth is willing, she must go in the care of some returning Friend from Philadelphia. As the season advances, there will doubtless be such an opportunity."

"But she must go at once to prevent the bequest of her uncle being of no effect through her absence. William Blake, that

is of our meeting, proposes to return with Ruth," replied Matthew, with evident doubt as to the effect of this information.

"And who is William Blake, may I ask? I do not recall the name."

"A young Friend from Nottingham that has been in the province for several years. He is much interested in Ruth, and will surely be company for her during the voy-

age."

"William, a young man, and Ruth, a young woman," rémarked Thomas, slowly. "No, Matthew, I can give thee no advice, unless it is that thee reconsiders the whole matter; and let me add, the meeting will be lax in their duty if they do not inquire closely into this whole subject. Thy anxiety to have her go, whatever the way and whatever the consequence, is a strange view of parental duty."

"Is not her going for her own good,—good in both ways? She acquires an independence in England, and is saved from possible marriage with one whom I fear is not at heart a Friend. I am doubly doing

my duty, as I see it; and as Ruth has so long been stubborn and received my reproofs with so little concern, she surely can care for herself during a voyage to England."

"If she sailed from here, she would land at Bristol, and it would be a lonely journey,

if alone, from there to Scarboro,"

"But William would accompany her," persisted Matthew.

"I cannot assist thee; it is a matter that I highly disapprove of." And here the conversation ended.

The next morning Matthew learned, as Thomas Gardiner had predicted, that the captains of the two vessels then at anchor before the town were both unwilling to take Ruth as a passenger unless other women went along; but there were ships at Philadelphia in which passage might be engaged. No offer that he could make would induce them to change their decision; and, more chagrined than he dare admit, he was left with the alternative to return home with nothing accomplished or go on another and longer day's journey to Philadelphia, and 161

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this he did. Even here he found difficulties and delays, but at last completed his task; and, as there were to be two other women passengers, neither Thomas Gardiner nor any of the Friends in Chesterfield could adversely criticise him. He felt infinitely relieved, and yet, two days later, when he attended meeting in Burlington, the Spirit did not move him to speak. Thomas Gardiner's eyes seemed steadily fixed upon him, and he was glad when the elders shook hands and meeting was over.

Matthew's peace of mind, or that stern confidence in his own strength which did poor duty for it, was not improved by the events of his trip. The cost was almost treble what he had anticipated, and he had much to provide for Ruth's comfort while on board. The sea was apt to be rough, the weather bad, and the voyage a long one, but he could take no backward step. He engaged her passage, and Ruth must now return to England about the middle of the month.

What, then, was his amazement when,

soon after reaching home, his wife remarked, as he was beginning to force himself to believe the threatened storm was over, "John Bishop has spoken to Ruth in thy absence and she has accepted him."

"Ruth accepted him!" he exclaimed, rising suddenly from his chair; "then does she decline to return?"

"I have not heard her say, Matthew; but why should not John return with her? or perhaps she will marry him and not go. I am too much troubled of late to think or advise; thee must speak to Ruth."

"She is at Robert Pearson's, thee said; will she return to-night?"

"I think not. She said it was likely to be her last visit there, and she will stay as long as possible. Thee knows how attracted she is to Robert's daughters."

"It has been a grievous trial to me," replied Matthew, assuming what might be called his "meeting" voice, "that we ever permitted her to become so friendly there. Are there no young people of Ruth's age in the land except at Robert Pearson's?"

"But Robert is my cousin, Matthew."

"Which does not lessen our responsibility in Ruth's case. Should she marry out of meeting or against our wishes, what will the elders say of me, of us, as guides in our household? She is yet a child and must obey as a child, and what she may have said to John Bishop is not binding upon her." And Matthew walked to and fro across the kitchen floor, with his hands clasped behind his back.

"She may hold her words binding, Matthew, and I believe she will."

"Have I, then, no authority in my own household?" asked Matthew of his wife, standing near and looking intently at her.

Anne Watson knew when silence was golden, and made no reply.

Chapter XIV.

Plots and Counter-plots.

"RUTH," called Robert Pearson, when he and John were within easy hailing distance, "have you no eyes for your cousin or for—" but Ruth had heard, and, stopping suddenly, waited for the two men to come up to her. Her greeting was cordial, but a little more restrained than it might have been had it been either John or Robert instead of both.

Her cousin noticed this at once, and before Ruth had more than said she was glad to see them, said, in a cheerful but earnest way, "Let's get down to business at once, Ruth, and blow the poetry of courtship to the winds. There is no time for it now."

Ruth blushed as her eyes wandered towards John, and he was very rosy, and so the more handsome in her eyes; but his quick glance spoke volumes, and Ruth knew they had met her for a serious purpose.

"Ruth, neither John nor I are willing that thee should go to England, if it can be prevented, and the question before us is, can we prevent it? I know of thy understanding with John, and so we will make no further reference to that, but let me add, I guessed it and was not told." And Robert looked at John and laughed heartily.

Poor John! he wished that Robert could attend to all this without his aid and he was busy in his shop. For the first time since their "understanding," as Robert called it, he had met Ruth, and under what strange circumstances; and the thought came stealing across his mind, Is this the conduct the world expects of a Friend? To enter into a conspiracy! But he saw Ruth's inquiring glances trying to read his thoughts, and forthwith all concern for other matters vanished. He had, in truth, but one thought, one aim, one ambition,—Ruth; and as he looked at her now, their glances meeting, he tried hard to have her read his heart.

"This is an ugly business, Ruth, and must be grappled with caution. Matthew has the

advantage in many ways,—the law is on his side; so, above all else, appear to be obedient," said Robert, earnestly; "a good deal will depend upon thy power of acting a part."

"But I hate it! Why can't I speak

out?"

"How like a woman! Mad in love with her lover, and before then mad in love with herself. Always acting a part, and a fetching one, too, that made many a Quaker breast thump like flails on the threshing-floor, and now she tells us she hates acting. Why, Ruth, was it not your sweet acting, the part you played, that won John?"

"Is this your important business, Cousin Robert? If so, I will go on to the house."

"Now, who is acting, Ruth? As if you could leave John in that heartless way. But come, let us talk seriously."

"I wish thee would," replied Ruth.

"Then let me unfold a plan, and ask for nothing but what we tell you," said Robert, speaking again in a sober, earnest way.

"That's like father; only so much as he

sees fit to tell me."

"He is not thy father, Ruth, and I wish thee would not call him so," said Robert,

impatiently.

"Mother would be displeased if I did not; but he is only father in name, and this I always remember when I speak to him. I do not remember that I ever kissed him in my life."

"And you'll not kiss him good-by, I'll warrant," Robert replied; and said, further, "This, in brief, is what John and I have determined upon. You are to start—"

"To start?"

"Yes, to start, and let the finish be in other hands. You shall not be left in doubt at any stage, but must trust implicitly, that there be no failure. A misstep might work endless mischief, you know. Isn't there some sort of a saying about a misstep—well, perhaps I'm thinking of something else; but trust us, John and I, and all will be well, and how the whole province will say 'amen!"

"Robert, thee frightens me. Is what cousin says thy counsel too?" And Ruth gave an anxious glance towards John and

held out her hand, as if she asked for his

support. John took her hand and said, "Yes, Ruth,

Robert is the better spokesman, and let him give my wishes their words. I trust thee will follow his advice in every particular. What is his counsel is mine, and when the day shall come that I can speak freely, there will be no words too strong to express how much we owe him. I once was instrumental in snatching thee from danger, and Robert may prove equally timely in drawing thee from another and a greater one." And John suddenly ceased speaking, feeling that further speech might too strongly betray his emotions.

"Thy earnest words, that sound so unlike thee, do not relieve my fears, John. What is the whole truth, John,-Robert? Do some one tell me! What has happened that I should be sent away from home, and be in danger too from the time I start? Why is there so much mystery about it all?" And Ruth was rapidly working herself up to a dangerous pitch of excitement.

"We are playing a game of chess, but this time with living figures, such as I wished to teach you, and it rests with you whether or not Matthew Watson is checkmated—and you, mated." And Robert laughed at his little joke at Ruth's expense. "Either John or I will give you written instructions, which you are not to read until on board the boat, and then without being observed by others to do so. Follow these simple directions and don't fear for the result. It may appear like taking a leap in the dark, but your present ignorance is your future good."

"I believe thee, cousin; but it seems all so strange," replied Ruth, with an effort at

cheerfulness.

"We cannot, if we would, tell you much more now, for all our plans are not matured. We have yet to learn what thy step-father proposes to do. You are to go down to Philadelphia in his boat, I believe, and when?"

"The ship I go in sails on the twentyfifth of Second month."

"The last week in April; well, that's

some days off; but, John, we must not let grass grow under our feet. Ruth, here is a little commonplace book with a dozen leaves left in it. Whatever you learn worth reporting write on one of these leaves and find some way to get it into John's hands or mine, but without folks knowing it. Don't let it be all covered over with love messages." And Robert made the woods ring with his merry laughter.

"But how can I do this? I cannot carry the leaves to John, thee knows."

"Much as you'd like to." And Robert laughed again.

"I believe thee will laugh at thy own funeral, cousin; but do tell me how, and please don't tease me so," pleaded Ruth, and she took a step nearer to John.

"That's right; put yourself under John's protection. You can't commence too soon." And again Robert laughed more heartily than ever.

"It is too bad of thee to go on so when I am all worked up with worry and dread. John, why does thee let him tease me so?"

At this appeal Robert could no longer contain himself, and laughed in his hearty way till his sides ached; then composing himself, he said, "I'll tell you how. I have to see Neighbor Watson almost every day about the new flood-gates, and, instead of meeting him at John's shop, I will come to the house and bring my maps and plans with me to spread out before him, and while we talk you can slip the note into my hand, or put it in my hat, or leave it under the flat stone by the lane gate. Only, I charge you, if you value your welfare and John's, find out all you can, and don't appear to be finding out anything; and what you hear report to 115."

"I will; and now do let me go home, for I have no head to carry on a conversation even with the girls, and want a chance to think in quiet; and oh, I am so tired of standing!"

"No, don't go back. Let the girls take care of you, and mother will coddle you till you're rosy as an apple again. If I meet Neighbor Watson as John and I go back

to the shop, I'll tell him you won't be home."

"But you won't see him, for he went to Burlington; but I told mother I might stay."

Ruth hesitated a moment. She wanted to say just one word to John, and yet Robert's presence restrained her. She must content herself with a formal hand-shake, she thought, which is such a poor substitute for a lover's farewell. Did Robert catch the current of Ruth's thought? John, too, lingered a little, and, while Robert's back was turned, he bent over Ruth's upturned face and, kissing her for the first time, whispered, "Farewell, Ruth, and trust us."

Chapter XV.

Music in Meeting.

On the west window-seat in Pearson's parlor there was an Æolian harp. For several years this had been a source of delight to Ruth, who never tired of the sweet sounds issuing therefrom when the soft breezes breathed upon its strings. From it she had received a few crude ideas of harmony, just as the metrical version of the Psalms had given her an idea of versification. The two had made her a poetess in a primitive way, and after a fashion a musician. Her thoughts would often run to rhyme, and she would startle her hearers with giving expression to her thoughts, as though humming an old song. It was this strange habit, which grew upon her as the years rolled by, that caused her cousin Robert to nickname her the "Quaker Fairie," with long-drawn emphasis on the final syllable.

This was a bit of pleasantry on Robert's part that would possibly have been straightway forgotten, but when he found his use of the name had startled and astonished Matthew Watson, he never lost opportunity to make use of it in her step-father's presence, and even went so far as to bribe the old man's boys, when little fellows, to call her "Fairy Ruth;" but the bribe was not sufficient recompense for the punishment they received, and the practice was nipped in the bud.

The harp at Pearson's was so constantly in Ruth's mind that she one day improvised one for herself, merely placing a single, tightly-drawn thread at the window's base and raising the sash so slightly that it would not be noticed as not all the way down. The result was pleasing. A faint, weird sound filled her little room, and, as she watched the setting sun and listened to this sweet whispering of the passing breeze, she composed many a short song in her artless way and stored them in her memory. The facilities for a written record of her thoughts were scanty, and to-day, though the weather

was chilly, she sat by her window and listened to the harp that all winter had been silent, and turned over and over the blank pages of the little book Robert Pearson had given her. "If I had had such books as these some years ago, how full they would have been now!" she said to herself; "and I do wonder if one leaf now cannot be spared;" for she longed to write a real letter to John, something she had never done in all her life. "But why is there no music to-day?" she asked aloud, and then, looking more closely at the window, found the cord had been removed, and remembered she had taken it to the almost unused sitting-room downstairs, and there it had been all winter. She laughed at her discovery, and then took up the blank-book again. Why, indeed, she thought, should she have been taught to more than write her name, there was so little opportunity to make use of the knowledge. It had been a source of drudgery at times, for it had fallen upon her to teach her brothers penmanship, and neither boy took to such instruction willingly. She was

learning nothing of importance, and so, why not a single leaf? There was ever so much to tell John, and when, at last willing to risk it, she thought of the ink-horn locked in her step-father's desk and no knife to whittle a goose-quill. "How did Robert expect me to write to him, with my blood smeared on the paper with a stick?" she said, aloud, and made the little room ring. "What a helpless creature I am! But it will not be always so." And Ruth went again to the window and looked out over the country for some time. Then she turned about and showed a face wreathed in smiles. "How they'll stare and start if it works!" she exclaimed, and, looking towards John's shop, she kissed her hand to the smoke that rose from its chimney and whispered, "Good-by, dear."

"Ruth dear," her mother said, as her daughter walked demurely into the kitchen, "father is concerned to have a religious meeting held here next Fifth day, and desires that thee should know it."

"Brother told me this morning, mother; I suppose he overheard father speaking of it."

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"I do trust thee will be present, and not wander away, forgetting thy privilege until too late," her mother said, in such a sober way that it plainly showed she had some misgivings.

"Never fear, mother dear, I'll be here." And Ruth put her arms about her mother's neck and held her in a tight embrace.

When she could get her breath, the troubled woman said, "Do, Ruth, give up thy strange habit. Thee is almost a woman now, and what will thy cousins think of thee?"

"My cousins? Who, the Pearsons?"

"No, dear, those in England;" but the words and the thought were too painful for Ruth's mother, and she leaned her head on her daughter's shoulder and said no more.

"Please, mother, do not worry; thee promised to be cheerful until I started, and this is not keeping thy word." And Ruth kissed her parent again and again.

"But thee'll be at meeting; father feared—"

"Then father is a-"

- "Ruth!"
- "Is altogether mistaken."

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Ruth was busy all the next day, and had scarcely time to do more than send word to John, without using a sheet of her cousin's note-book, that she hoped nothing would prevent his being present at meeting at her father's house on Fifth day morning, signing the note, with no little fluttering, "Thine, Ruth." For a long time she looked at those two words, which meant so much, so very much more than she perhaps realized; but could sorrow follow the fulness of such joy as now possessed her? She could not believe it. And then, looking, as usual, towards John's shop, she asked herself, When will the day come, and what of the "Pearson plot," as she called the long conversation with her cousin and John,-that "leap in the dark," what did it mean? But with all this strange medley of joy, doubt, and fear, she was trustful, and felt safe beyond all harm in the care of her cousin and of John.

"Mother," asked Ruth, "will meeting be

held in the west room or in the kitchen or in the hall, or all of them?"

"In the west room, dear," replied her mother, delighted that her daughter should show so much interest in the matter; "and if that will not accommodate the Friends, there will be room in the hall."

"The women Friends will sit in there, then," said Ruth, pointing to the west room, "and the men in the hall. I shall sit next the window, and if the preaching is not good, I'll listen to the birds on the hill-side. They sing many a lesson we might well take to heart. A merry bird is the foe of despondency, I've heard cousin Robert say, and I incline to many of his views."

"Ruth dear, I fear thee is not a Friend at heart; surely John Bishop, too, does not hold thy strange views."

"Mother, if it is strange or worldly or wicked to love a singing bird, then I am wicked all over and through and through. How often have I told thee this! And, mother, when I was a little girl and came into the house with my apron full of flowers

and threw them in thy lap, thee would laugh and call me a little witch, and why should a few years make such a difference? Why, the day I spent at the basket-maker's by the three beeches, and that poor Indian, 'that benighted soul,' as thee calls him, told me about the birds and beasts and where the eagle had its nest and the lynx its lair and where the rare flowers grew in the gloomy woods, I learned more than ever in any meeting, and been the better ever since, for I have seen the world look bright when others might say it was a dismal time o' year. We have no right to treat this beautiful world as beneath our notice because we do not understand it. That poor Indian's knowledge may not be of such use to him as it should be, and I wonder how he, knowing what he does, can be willing to lie in a drunken stupor so often; but, mother, he has made the sun to shine more brightly for me every time I go out of doors, and things mean so much more to me now, and the birds and flowers preach sermons that make what the Friends say seem very crude and

harsh. No, I do not like attending meeting as well as a ramble in the fields or over the meadows. I can think better there and come back more at peace with myself and the world than when I come from meeting. John knows this, and while he does not quite approve, perhaps, he has never taken me to task for such worldliness. Besides, mother," said Ruth, after a pause, and with a sudden lighting of her face and added lustre to her splendid eyes, "he has never had a chance to' say much since." And knowing that her mother knew to what time "since" referred, she abruptly stopped speaking.

"Thee is like thy father's people, Ruth; but when thee is older I trust there will be a sobering of thy views and such a change as thy father experienced. I have tried very

hard to keep thee-"

"Straight? Well, mother dear, I have only been a little wavy at times, but kept a pretty direct course. Don't thee know how the water bubbles and boils in the brooks where there's a stone or stick in the way?

but it gets by them and runs on smoothly as before; so I bubble and boil over when I meet with a bird or a flower or hear Pearson's pretty harp on the window-seat, but I never leave the channel of my life and find myself floundering out of my element; so in the end—well, mother, who, after all, knows about the end? Friend Bunting and Friend Stacy preach and pray, pray and preach, but, mother, do they know, know all about the mystery of a human life? Does thee suppose Friend Bunting will be preaching at me all Fifth day morning? If so, I shall close my ears."

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Fifth day came, sunny, warm, and with that gentle westward breeze that has been aptly called the breath of spring. An hour or more before meeting was called the Friends came, in carts, on horseback, and on foot. They gathered in little knots about Matthew Watson's yard, and Matthew himself was in his element. Never had he been so satisfied with the world and with himself. He was a central figure to-day, and never

were religious phrases so glibly rolled from his tongue; for, if worked up to something near the fever heat, Matthew could talk easily and well, and after painful preparation had, at times, become eloquent. Robert Pearson had been wicked enough to say that Matthew's memory was remarkable, and the sermons preached in Philadelphia had been carried without damage to the Crosswicks Valley; but then Robert was of the world, worldly, the Friends insisted.

At the appointed hour, ten o'clock, the Friends had gathered in the house and were seated as Ruth wished. A dozen women in the west room and perhaps as many men in the room and hall, the door being open and the seats so arranged about it that words spoken in one room could be heard in the other. Ruth entered late, and never had she appeared to greater advantage. Her hair was not held in much restraint; as was then the fashion, matted to the temples like so many square inches of yellow canvas, such as samplers were worked upon. Her clear skin was well set off by the roses in her

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cheeks, and no Friend had yet dared to preach against them. There was the look of love in her eyes, meant only for her mother and John, it may be, but shedding a light over all, and so appropriated by every one. The few young Friends present could not wholly keep their eyes from her, for, being at home, she wore no bonnet. These young Friends were not envious,—it would be unfair to say that,—but during the silence they timidly wondered why Ruth was so different from all others.

Ruth sat at the west end of the room, as she had told her mother she would, and when all was still again, for every one moved slightly when she appeared, she picked up a little silk shawl that was lying on the window sill, threw it over her shoulder as if to ward off a draught, and then put it back. The whole movement was so natural and so rapid as to be scarcely noticed even by those nearest her.

A long silence followed, and then, as Ruth supposed, Friend Bunting arose, and removing her bonnet, said, in that "preaching"

voice that cannot be imitated, "Whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning, of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, and of putting on of apparel."

At this Ruth looked at the speaker with a little flash of indignation in her eyes, and, without perceptible movement of her arm, removed the shawl from the window-seat, and before the preacher had gotten farther in her text than "but let it be," the kindly breeze swept over the hidden cord and the little room was filled with sweetest melody.

Never before had a text received such a reception, and whatever was in Friend Bunting's mind was now beyond recall. She sat down and replaced her bonnet, as if she would hide herself from those gathered about her.

That every one present should look up in a bewildered way was not surprising, but why stare at Ruth! It was too sweet a sound for any human voice, and yet some of the gathered Friends thought of her habit of singing, and wondered if this strange music too was one of her accomplishments. The

meeting did not break up. The disturbing, unearthly sounds ceased as quickly as it started; and after a few minutes' silence, Matthew Watson, without text, spoke of the responsibility of parents; of the trials of godly parents when their children were rebellious-but Ruth's patience was soon exhausted. Again the little shawl, that had been carelessly thrown down, was removed, and, as if the winds were at her command, a steadier breeze set the cord in motion, and the weird sound, loud and clear as a trumpet, swept through the room. Matthew stopped and stared, then sat down as abruptly as had Friend Bunting, and as he did so the sound ceased

All the while John Bishop had been sitting by the open door, where he could see Ruth plainly, and not the slightest motion of her head or hands had escaped him. He alone had guessed the truth, for he was familiar with the Pearson harp. Now was revealed to him a daring on Ruth's part that surprised him. He could not approve, yet could no more condemn. He had never ventured

before to speak in a religious meeting, but free-spoken when matters of business were under discussion. To-day, all was different. It was a gathering, too, at a private house. There was no reason why he should not add his testimony. After a moment's pause he rose from his chair and said, "Parents, provoke not your children unto wrath." The elders, sitting in another room, had not seen him rise, and before the last of the few words had been uttered those that faced the little company had shaken hands and the meeting was over.

Chapter XVI.

The Departure of Ruth.

THE day of Ruth's departure came at last, and she, knowing how full of events the next few days were likely to be, woman-like, was more eager to be off than distressed at the thought of leaving home. 'She knew, of course, far more than did her neighbors, but they, in their ignorance, attributed her "heartlessness" to that general strangeness that had marked all her career; and as John Bishop did not go about with a long face, it was supposed the engagement that had been rumored had been broken. "Poor John." his neighbors said among themselves, "to be carried away by a pretty face, but with nothing behind it." These comments may or may not have come to John's ears, but he made no sign. However much he might have liked to let the world know the truth. it was his part to remain silent; and while

Robert Pearson was very active and continually coming and going to and from John's shop, Matthew Watson's house, and the landing where the boat was being made ready for the first trip of the season, John was passive. There was an abundance of work to be done. and he and his helpers were busy all day long, and he worked the harder, so his neighbor's thought, that he might drown the disappointment he had suffered. To think that Ruth Davenport had dared to trifle with so good a man; to accept him as her lover, it might be said, when she was poor, and then, finding herself an heiress, coolly going away, without a trace of regret. "It must weigh heavily upon her poor mother to have so heartless a child," was the common verdict all over Chesterfield and Nottingham. Little wonder at this, for the children of the township suffered terribly when a comparison was drawn. Healthy, good-looking children, and all that, but Ruth was rarely beautiful.

Ruth had failed almost entirely to learn the details of her step-father's plans, and not until two days before his boat was to start

for Philadelphia did she positively learn whether the voyage was to commence at Watson's landing or she was to go on board at Bordentown and so escape a wearisome day on the creek, where, indeed, she might have to remain all night if wind and tide did not suit when the mouth of the creek was reached.

Ruth's mother began, at the very last, to realize how crudely planned was the whole matter and how little Ruth's comfort had been considered. Was it to save Matthew a little trouble or expense? She began to fear the truth of this and rebelled, and was the more firm in the stand she took after a long conference with Robert Pearson, who urged that Ruth should not go by the boat at all; but, if necessary, then let her go aboard at Bordentown, and so be as little time as possible on the cramped shallop that could afford almost no privacy and but meagre shelter if it was stormy. And so, though Matthew demurred and rudely resented Robert's interference, it was determined that Ruth should go in her cousin's wagon,

the only pretentious vehicle in the township, and not at all comfortable, but better than the boat, and he would himself see her safely on board. Her few personal effects had been packed in the old chest, and the morning that it was to be placed on board the shallop, to the surprise of every one, Robert brought her two new oaken chests with stout iron clasps.

"Her clothes are already packed in one chest that I have given her," remarked Matthew Watson, impatiently, "and there was no use of this at all. Has not John enough to do not to concern himself in such matters? Am I not charged with her welfare and the proper one to see her safely on her journey? She has weighed heavily upon me of late, and will, it seems, to the end."

"It was an act of kindness on John's part," his wife replied, gently.

"It would be more of one to have done nothing of the kind."

"The new chests are stronger than the old, but one of them is large enough for what Ruth needs to take. The old one is

not full. I do not think it will take long to make the change," said Mrs. Watson, in the same quiet way; "but here comes Ruth and she can judge."

"Yes, she can judge, so thee has always thought, and we have been led astray continually by allowing her to judge, where we should have done so for her. Thee has humored Ruth from her youth up, and so brought many a concern upon us," continued her husband, his impatience more and more pronounced.

"Well, father, the days of thy trials, so far as I am concerned, will very soon be over, so try to have a little more patience, and don't blame mother when I only am at fault. What are these?" And Ruth looked and pointed at the two chests.

"Ruth dear, John has sent them to thee for thy journey."

"How nice in him, when I said I did not need them! Thee knows I changed my mind when we talked the matter over."

"Talked the matter over?" repeated Matthew, in a surprised manner.

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"Yes, it was a whim of mine, but I afterwards thought otherwise; but John, it seems, did not. Come, mother, let's out of the old and into the new. One will do for me, and thee keep the other for linen."

Matthew seeing, as usual, that he was wholly ignored by Ruth, and that his words would fall in all likelihood on deaf ears, turned away with some low muttered words that neither woman heard, and in a short time after they were left to themselves the unpacking and repacking was accomplished. Then Ruth said, "Now, mother, let me be alone here in my little room awhile. I go to-morrow, thee knows, and I would be alone; but, mother dear, I will join thee very soon, and then—" But Ruth's emotions overcame her, and, resting her head on her mother's shoulder, she wept bitterly.

How few in that community knew what a trying ordeal was hers, and how bravely she was passing through it! But when, an hour later, she left her room, it was to greet her mother with the old-time winning smiles, and as she sat, as she had so often done, at

her feet, she sang, in her own sweet, peculiar way a few stanzas that seemed fitting to the occasion and then a long, unbroken silence ensued.

Mother and daughter were alike oblivious to Matthew Watson's presence, and he would surely have interrupted Ruth had he dared, when she was singing. As it was, his subsequent scolding about the scandal brought upon him and his house by Ruth's conduct was spent upon his patient wife.

* * * * * * *

The parting was a painful one, and many were the neighbors that gathered at the Watson house when, seated in her cousin Robert's wagon, she commenced her long journey. Many a neighbor, critical as they had been in times past, shed an honest tear as she passed down the winding lane and was gone.

Matthew Watson looked more stern and forbidding than ever, and was indisposed to converse with any one. The truth was, he had been baffled at many points and his importance lessened, he feared, even in his

own house. At least in some particular he would have his own way, and, without informing his wife, who had denied herself that day to every caller, he returned the unused chest that John Bishop had made.

Buth's ride to Bordentown was uneventful. The road was terrible, a mere mass of mud and tree-stumps that threatened disaster at every turn of the wheels. She and her cousin talked at a lively pace on every subject but that which most nearly concerned her. No allusion was made to the journey, but when the village was reached, Robert made haste to learn if the Watson boat had reached the mouth of the creek. It had not, and the time was spent in a call upon friends with whom they were both acquainted. It was late in the day when the boat reached the little wharf and the cabin inspected by Robert, who expressed surprise that Matthew had even done as much as appeared. Ruth could be alone, but in such cramped quarters, Robert charged her never to stay in the place long, or she could never straighten out again. The crew were charged to look after Ruth's

comfort above all else, and then the moment for the second parting came. Ruth held her cousin's hand for a moment as they stood on the little deck of the shallop, and then turned her face upward as if expecting to be kissed. He bent his head down, but only to whisper a few words, and slipped a folded bit of paper into her other hand. Then he turned away abruptly and left her, and Ruth, glancing at the wide expanse of water as if it were a farewell look, went into the cabin.

The light was fast fading as she unfolded the crumpled bit of paper and read, "When the owl hoots thrice in quick succession, go on deck to the rudder-post, and if any attempt is made to stop you, take a leap in the dark. They will not start until after midnight. William Blake will be on board." Ruth shuddered as she read these words, and her strength was well-nigh gone. Her only source of comfort was in crying, and this she did. She gave way to her feelings freely yet without attracting attention. She had reached a crisis in her life, and could she meet it? Why had she not fought for her

right to remain? Why had not John married her, even if out of meeting? Why was her cousin Robert willing she should go? What was a fortune in England and all her friends in this country? These and a score of other questions she asked, forgetting that she was really not going away.

It was fortunate for her that she gave way to her feelings as she did. It was the passing shower that makes the world clearer and brighter than before, and she lay down for a short nap, knowing that through the night she must be widely awake and quick to catch the signal, "when the owl hoots thrice in quick succession."

Chapter XVII.

A Night on the Creek.

John Bishop worked in his shop as usual the morning that Ruth left her step-father's house with Robert Pearson; and not for an instant did he give a look or utter a word indicative of his busy thoughts. To the world he appeared resigned, giving heed to that inward voice that was reproving him for his errors in regard to Ruth, so Friend Bunting thought; for after failing to see Ruth's mother, she had called at the shop, with the flimsiest of excuses on her lips and her real purpose showing clearly in her every word and action. All went well for a while, and John did not lose his temper, but as the day drew to a close, he was finally roused to a pitch of excitement, and told his hired men he would close the shop early and they might go. He felt that he must be alone

after he saw the chest that he had made brought back by Matthew Watson's boys.

"Did your father send this back?"

"Yes, he told us to bring it. Mother was up-stairs when we came, but I guess she knows too. Sister Ruth hadn't enough to put in both, and father said thee might find some one who wanted this, and what was the charge for the one sister took?"

John bit his lip to keep from laughing, and quite forgot the two lads that stood wondering and waiting for an answer. Finally coming back from the world of day-dreams to this more prosy one, he said, "Tell your father, boys, that Ruth paid for them both, but I will keep this one for the present." The boys left without delay, and John again said to his helpers he would close the shop and they might go. "I have some accounts to cast up and such work, and will be some time." The men left, wondering what had happened, and, knowing a little and thinking they knew a great deal more, drew their own conclusions.

John had not told a white lie. He did

have a rude account-book with him, and when alone he trimmed a quill, and, opening the ink-horn, wrote and figured for some time. Then going to the shop door, he looked up and down the road, and, neither seeing nor hearing any one, he came back, laid a broad board against the little window by the forge, and took hold of the handles at the ends of the little chest. Its weight surprised him, for surely it was not that heavy when he sent it to Ruth. He tried the lid, but found it locked. He looked and frowned and puzzled over it, and then, hurriedly searching through a box of old keys, he tried one after another until a fitting one was found. The bolt turned; he raised the lid and there saw, carefully folded, one of Ruth's dresses, and clothing was beneath it to the bottom of the chest. What did it mean? Then he saw, pinned to the uppermost fold of the dress, the little note-book Robert Pearson had given her. This he took so eagerly that he endangered both it and the dress, and found on its first page a message from her, the second he had ever

received. It ran as follows: Dear John,—I am playing a part now that I was not told to do. Father will surely send back the other chest, so I have filled the one that goes to the boat with rubbish, and hope my other will safely reach you before I need its contents. Can thee not send it to cousin Pearson's? I have not time to add any loving words, and why should I? unless cousin is over-confident. Let us hope not.—Ruth.

John read the note over and over again; then closing the little book, he arranged his dress, putting on an outer coat, and from behind a pile of oak and ash strips that were used in his work took a stout hickory cane. Then, stepping out, he carefully locked the doors and turned towards Crosswicks Creek. It was not as dark as he wished, but he looked at the sky and saw with evident satisfaction that the night bid fair to be cloudy before very long. Avoiding the highway where bounded by open fields, John walked rapidly, swinging the stout cane and at times striking viciously at the twigs that crossed his path. At heart John was a Quaker, no

one could doubt this, but to-night he was one of the fighting type,—and they are everywhere,—if we judged by his actions. Instead of a hat, broad-brimmed and high-crowned, he wore a closely-fitting fur cap, and his outer coat was so closely buttoned that his general appearance was much altered. An intimate friend might meet him in the dim light and be in doubt as to his identity.

The path that John had taken was well known to him, and he made rapid progress, and, as the distance between the shop and Bordentown was but five miles, he was by no means fatigued when he reached the outskirts of the village. Then he sat down to rest and to wait, for he was ahead of time and had abundant leisure for the supper he had brought with him.

"This is a strange affair, and not till now have I realized what Friend Pearson's cunning scheming means," John said to himself as he sat in the retired woods, shielded from every observer who might pass near by; but people were not likely to be abroad at such a time, and there were no roving

bands of Indians about that he had heard of.

The little peeping frogs in the far-off marshes were whistling and clicking merrily, and as the breeze bore this strange sound nearer and then carried it away until almost unheard, so John's hopes and fears came and went. Not cowardice at the possible danger to himself of carrying out his plans, but lest for reasons beyond his control they might not succeed. Then the flood-tide of his love for Ruth would sweep over him, and he was ready to meet the world on any terms. What though the meeting should question the stand that he had taken? He knew that the truth could be preached from the hill-tops without reflection upon her or upon himself, and the murmured slander, the meaning look, the hint, suspicion on the part of his nearest friends,-all this he must meet, it may be, but with Ruth by his side he would have strength to do it. "But," continued John, musing, "there must not come an ugly word directly to my ears." And the Friends' principle of non-resistance and long

suffering sank into the background. "I should regret the necessity but not the nature of the step," John said to himself, with a fixedness of purpose ringing in every word; and then, leaving his resting-place, he turned at right angles to the path he had been following, and, pushing through a weedy tangle of vines, dwarfed shrubbery, and sprouting weeds, he came in a few moments to the bank of the creek, and found, as he expected, a large canoe with three paddles moored near the muddy shore.

"He said I would find what I wanted at the boat," John muttered to himself; and stealthily and silently as an Indian on the war-path—here we have a professed Friend as one—he cut a long, slender switch, but not too yielding, as he held it at full length over the water. Withdrawing it, he laid it lengthwise in the canoe, and using his outer coat, which he had taken off, as a shield, he struck fire from his flint, kindled a bit of tinder, and then lit a small lantern, which he securely tied to the tapering end of the long pole. This he covered carefully with his

coat. "If it doesn't go out or burn out I shall be thankful, and it will be the only time it was of any use," John said to himself, so cheerfully that doubtless he was smiling when he spoke. It was a plan of Robert Pearson's that John classed among the over-confidences of the plan as a whole.

"And now for the seat of war," continued John, almost audibly,—a queer phase for a Friend's mouth. And with the skill of the Indian who had taught him to paddle a canoe he shot out into the stream and headed for Bordentown. Every moment it was growing darker, and if there were other people abroad at this time in boats, John thought how readily an accident might happen. Frequently he stopped to listen, but only the chatter of the peeping frogs or the swirl of the rapid waters as the incoming tide swept about stranded tree-trunks was heard. Then on and on, guided by the little light that filtered through the clouds, he at last saw a dull red light gleaming fitfully near the water's surface, and he knew that the Watson boat, with Ruth on board, was near. John

paddled more cautiously now, and when the boat was but a hundred yards distant as he judged, he placed a twisted bit of birch bark to his mouth and sent the eagle-owl's hollow cry down the valley of the creek,—Hoŏ hoŏ hoŏ, hoō hoō! and then urged the canoe ahead with rapid but silent strokes. Again he sounded the same wild cry, and now the boat was very near. He thought he could see the mast, and for the third time, though not so loudly, sounded the owl-cry signal. The boat was now reached, and John, with skilled hand, held the canoe astern with the paddle.

By standing he could dimly see the full sweep of the deck, and knew, if Ruth appeared, he could follow her movements. Would she never come? No one can count the seconds of an anxious minute. Was she asleep? Hark! he saw a crouching figure coming towards the canoe. It was she! Reaching the rudder-post, she whispered, "Cousin Robert."

[&]quot;Not Robert, but John."

[&]quot;John! Oh! why did thee come?"

"Step over the rail and let me help thee. Quick; step anywhere!"

"But, John."

"Step quick; they're coming." And Ruth was as much drawn over the boat's stern as she moved by her own volition; and when her hands loosened their hold on her step-father's boat, she sank helplessly into the bottom of the canoe.

"Courage, dear," whispered John; "do not give way now, or all may be lost." But his words were lost upon Ruth.

"Who's there?" sounded a rough voice, and the boat's light was held up as if to cast a glow upon the water.

a glow upon the water.

John made no reply, but with a powerful stroke of the paddle made towards shore.

"Speak, or I'll shoot!" cried the same

rough voice.

"Then you may shoot a woman," John replied in an unnatural voice; and lifting the pole carefully, the coat fell from it, and to his inexpressible thankfulness the little lantern showed a gleam of light. Steadying the canoe, he held it out at arm's length,

away from them, and said to Ruth, who had given some evidence of consciousness, "If they do shoot, this light will deceive them." But the canoe was drifting, and this would never do. John dropped the pole and paddled vigorously, but so quietly that he heard the voices of those on board the Watson boat, and above all else recognized William Blake's voice, bemoaning that "Ruth had gone; her cabin was empty."

A flush of fiery indignation thrilled him as he heard these words, but there was no time now for other than his single duty. Ruth was rescued, but not yet ashore. Carefully guiding the canoe, which he found was not followed, John paddled as swiftly as he dare, but kept near the shore until he had made considerable headway, when he turned to the channel as a safer course, and proceeded homeward.

The danger was over, and now again he spoke to Ruth, and assured her that all was well.

"Oh John," she sobbed, "if it had been Cousin Robert!"

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"And why not I as well? Friend Pearson could not manage a canoe."

"But, John, alone, here."

The meaning of her words flashed across John's mind, and he was dumb. Could the world be so cruel? he thought. "Speak, Ruth, speak to me; it was the only way to thwart thy father's plans and save thee from a worse fate perhaps than the breath of scandal. Does thee put no trust in me?"

John's pleading brought Ruth to her better senses.

"Trust thee, dear; who then, John, might I trust? To thee and Cousin Robert I owe my life."

"And thee shall be in thy cousin's charge before thee thinks," replied John, cheerily. "Put on my outer coat that I brought thee, if thee can without much moving, for the night is chilly; but don't upset us." And John spoke in a way that was for the first time that day wholly natural.

"I think I have been pretty well upset already," replied Ruth; and hearing her words, free from all trace of fear or feeling of shame,

John laughed in a quiet way that was not lost upon Ruth. They were again their natural selves, and so happy beyond measure.

"Here are the Swan Island flood-gates," exclaimed John. "Hark!"

A long, low whistle was heard, as though a dreaming red-bird had announced the dawn, and John replied, again imitating the eagle-owl. The canoe was headed in shore, and scarcely had its bottom grated on the sandy shore than Ruth rose, but to fall, almost a-faint, in the arms of her cousin Robert.

No time was lost. The canoe was quickly anchored; and Robert, John, and Ruth, seated in the wagon, were on their way to Pearson's. The horse was urged to the limit of its strength, and before cock-crow Robert Pearson's anxious wife had seen Ruth safely at rest.

Chapter XVIII.

Robert defies Matthew.

WILD stories of pirates, robbery, and abduction were soon rife about Bordentown. and fearful tales as carried from one to another soon reached Matthew Watson. His boat had been destroyed, the crew lashed to the deck, and Ruth carried away; and then, quickly following these harrowing details, came a more nearly correct version of the incident. No one was injured, no property taken or destroyed, but Ruth had disappeared. There had been no outcry, no call for help, the crew were asleep, and everything pointed to its having been a voluntary act on the girl's part, but with whom was she in collusion? Well, Matthew could not say he was surprised, much as he regretted it. affair cast a shadow upon him as her natural guardian, but he had done his whole duty for sixteen years, and should submit his version

of the matter to the meeting. But with whom could she have gone? Not with John Bishop, for he was at his shop until late that day, and again, cheerful and unconcerned, early the next morning. Had Robert Pearson seen any suspicious conditions when he saw Ruth on board the shallop? Matthew Watson asked himself this question, and determined that he would repeat it to Robert and press him for an answer; then, too, it was her cousin who had taken her in his cart to Bordentown, and so the last to talk with her.

Sympathizing friends soon gathered about Ruth's afflicted mother, and, leaving her to their care, Matthew hurried to the Pearson house, acting so well the part of an anxious parent that he favorably impressed every one whom he met. He was glad to find Robert at home, and not a little surprised to see how slight an interest he took in the subject when Ruth's disappearance was mentioned. Robert replied in detail to every question put to him by Matthew. Ruth had said nothing about such a madcap scheme, and was very

cheerful nearly all the time. He had gone on the boat with her, and saw that she might be fairly comfortable if the trip was short; but why had he directed that they should start with that tide, instead of twelve hours later, which would still leave plenty of time, and avoid the night on the boat? and did he know that William Blake had come from Philadelphia to Bordentown to be with her? Was this not a scheme to further William's wishes and compromise Ruth? Good Quaker methods of furthering a whim. And Robert spoke in such a sneering tone that Matthew grew very red in the face and twisted uneasily in his chair. "Yes," Robert said, in conclusion, "I left Ruth on the boat, and soon after returned home. I made good my promise, but I am sorry I did so. Was it to be done over again, I would do very differently, and openly interfere and prevent her going; at least, I would be strongly tempted to do so."

"I am amazed to hear thee talk in this way, though I know thee to be a rash, worldly man."

"Well, people do not see the world alike, and I am very glad that I have not Quaker eyes," Robert replied, without any trace of irritation. "As I look at it, Ruth's surroundings, except her mother's presence, have never been what they should. She is much the superior of the flock of namby-pamby women that have swooped down on the Crosswicks Valley and changed every laughing feature to a sober one. I have faith in Ruth, an abiding, boundless faith, and have no fear for her future. She has doubtless not been so rash as now appears, and all will be well. Her mother should not worry. Would Matthew tell his wife what her cousin thought?" And then Robert pulled vigorously at his pipe, until the tobacco burned again, and he sent wreaths of fragrant smoke to the ceiling and watched their progress, quite oblivious to the fact that his visitor was eying him intently.

"Underneath thy fine speeches, Robert," Matthew finally remarked, "I believe thee is concealing something from me. Thee could tell me more if thee was willing, and

it is my right to be informed, and thy duty to tell me all thee knows."

"What!" exclaimed Robert, jumping from his chair and turning his back to the fire-place. "Tell all that I could? Well, if I did that, the township would be all upset for the season. You came here and asked me a long string of questions, not waiting for answers, and I replied in the same order, as near as I could remember. What question did you put that I forgot to reply to?" And Robert replaced his pipe and sent more wreaths of smoke to the ceiling.

"Does thee know where Ruth is, and who did she go away with? Can thee answer these, and will thee?"

"I can," replied Robert; "but for the present I shall not."

"But it is my right to know," exclaimed Matthew, also rising from his chair. "This is a conspiracy that may bring thee great trouble if thee is not very careful."

"Perhaps it is, Neighbor Watson; you say it is your right to know as much as I do

in this matter. All I can say is, proceed to enforce it."

"But thee knows that it is against our principles—" But Robert promptly checked the speaker here and assured him that he was dealing with one not a Quaker, and must proceed in accordance with the laws of the province.

"I did not run away with Ruth, and so there's an end of that matter; but I do know who took her from the boat last night." And Robert looked Matthew very squarely in the eyes as he made the announcement.

"And what scandal has she brought upon the household, the community, and her poor mother!" remarked Matthew, with an ill attempt to be pathetic.

"One word, Matthew, on that score, and only one. Don't you prate about scandal and couple it with Ruth's name. Not here, in my house, or anywhere in my hearing. There'll be an end to that sort of tattle very quick if the old women get to shaking their heads or wagging their long tongues. It is

an outrage that I will not tolerate." And Robert showed plainly how thoroughly he meant what he had said.

"But is it not most unseemly that a young woman should be out in a boat, and at night and alone?"

"What! That from you! And who put her on a boat to be alone, day and night, for perhaps two days, and with a man, too, she detests? The less you say of all this the better, or the tide will turn against you and swallow you up, as I only wish it would. What did happen may have been unfortunate, but it was necessary, and now let us come back to business. You have reckoned all along without your host, as you will find out. You said just now Ruth's fair name might be tarnished, but there'll be no washing the blot from the name of the stepfather, if I read aright the world's way of thinking. Yes, I know where she is, and can prove the truth of my assertion. She is under this roof, safe and happy, and her only wish is that her mother shall know this. I did not intend to tell you at first, but I

have changed my mind. Not that anything you have said has influenced me. Ruth is tired and needs all the rest she can get, so you cannot see her. Wife is an excellent nurse, so you need have no care as to her welfare." And, after the delivery of this long speech, Robert yawned so long and audibly that Matthew saw he was anxious to close the interview.

"Thee seems to look lightly upon thy part in this affair, and I am astonished at the stand thee has taken. May I ask how Ruth got here? Thee said thee did not assist her to leave the boat."

"I do not know that I am called upon to go into particulars. When it is necessary I will do so."

"This, I suppose, is the world's way of looking at it. It may be I cannot force thee to speak, but I can think of thee as I choose," said Matthew, making a desperate effort to look like dignity offended.

Robert laughed at him. "Well, Matthew, you can make a pretty shrewd guess as to what I think. It is enough to know

that Ruth did get here, limp as a rag and all hollow-eyed with much crying and all that, but my wife got her well composed in short order, and when you came in she was still sound asleep; and this is all that I have to tell you, except that if you think I am liable before the law for what part I have taken in her rescue, do take up the matter at once, for as soon as May comes in Ruth and John Bishop will be married, if I am not altogether mistaken. Until then she will make her home with me." And Robert put on a defiant air that puzzled Matthew, who wanted to say more, but must have time to collect his thoughts.

At last he found words wherewith to express his feelings. "I was not prepared when I came for such extraordinary tidings—"

"Which," said Robert, interrupting him, "were not half so extraordinary as your own acts, for which there was no apparent reason. Isn't John Bishop an improvement over William Blake?"

Matthew paid no attention to Robert's words, and continued, "—to be thus boldly

told to my face that I cannot see or have the custody of my child."

"She is not your child!" exclaimed Robert, angrily, "and she is my cousin, though a distant one, and until she is safely married she shall not leave me, unless it be her will to do so; and now let's put an end to this palaver. Go tell Cousin Anne that Ruth is safe, and if you've any sense of decency, keep out of sight."

Robert's manner spoke as plainly as his words; and Matthew, seeing there was nothing to be gained by prolonging his stay, picked up his ungainly hat and with a most formal and scarcely audible "farewell" left the house.

Chapter XIX.

A Committee calls upon John Bishop.

In a few days every inhabitant of Chesterfield and Nottingham had an inkling of the truth, and so were forced to content themselves with weaving theories and predicting the outcome of the whole affair. the Pearson household, with the exception of John Bishop, no one knew the whole truth, and the inquisitive public-which was all of it—were more at sea than ever as to the incident on the Watson boat, when William Blake appeared upon the scenes. He had failed in all else, and why not pose as a hero now, when nothing but Ruth's flight was talked of? He had, he said, gone on board the shallop but an hour before,-lucky that he and John did not meet in mid-stream. -and was called by one of the crew, saying there were drunken Indians about. He rushed to Ruth's cabin to defend her, and she

was gone! Had she bribed these Indians to carry her off? How he linked her name with his in his wild talk! and, alas! how eagerly his audiences accepted all his absurd suggestions! It is strange, but how they had been mistaken in William Blake! What a fine fellow he was, truly! Of course no one but a fool would have done as he did; but then, he was a fool, and a gaping crowd will follow one rather than a philosopher.

William went to Watson's, and was received as a guest, notwithstanding the protest of Ruth's mother; but her husband insisted that the man was misunderstood, and she should not be prejudiced by the world's people who spoke against him. He had property, was industrious and devoted to her daughter, and only that child's perversity and waywardness had thwarted his wishes, for William might to-day have been successfully in trade and Ruth's accepted suitor. Anne Watson shuddered as she heard these words; repeating the most distasteful ones beneath her breath, "Ruth's husband," and, as she

had long ago learned to do, except on rare occasions, remained silent.

Naturally, William Blake desired to become conspicuous in meeting, and hoped to be put upon a committee to confer with Matthew Watson and then with John Bishop. The matter of Ruth's disappearance and subsequent defiance of her step-father could not be overlooked. Ruth was a birthright member of the society, and should she not be disowned?

There were some hard-headed, practical men in the Crosswicks meeting who seldom spoke, but when they did it was to excellent purpose. Caleb Wheatley was one of these. "Had they sought," he asked, "Ruth's reason for her rash act? It was to be as carefully weighed as the statements of Matthew Watson."

How Matthew stared and frowned when he heard this!

"Was John Bishop a party to the affair? Probably; but had they his admission to that effect, or discovered any proof of his complicity? Might they not be groping in the

dark, and their efforts be as vain as beating the air? The meeting appeared to be of one mind, but might not a whole meeting be in error?"

Caleb's warnings fell upon deaf ears. The meeting as such was incapable of going astray, and they went on with committee appointments and committee instruction as if they were attending wholly to their own business, which they were not. Robert Pearson was not within their jurisdiction and John Bishop was. He must be called upon to explain, and it was a foregone conclusion only that would be acceptable that did not conflict with what Matthew Watson had said.

Robert Pearson, who mysteriously kept posted upon every movement "of the enemy," as he called them, and yet was always deep in the background, knew of the time of the committee conferring with Matthew, and pretty shrewdly guessed at the result. It was in effect that Matthew was a long-suffering saint and John Bishop a miserable sinner. All was so clear to them now

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that their call upon John partook of a character quite foreign to their instructions. They had no questions to ask, but assertions to make, based upon the assumption of Matthew's veracity. They must proceed without delay to call John to account, and demand his explanation for so flagrant a breach of all proprieties in a Christian assembly and placing the meeting in an unfavorable light before the whole world. Their zeal as inquisitors was growing rapidly warmer, when Robert Pearson, looking out of the shop door, exclaimed, "His Majesty's ghost, John, here come three owls on horseback!"

"Not all on one horse, I hope," replied John, coming to the door.

Sure enough, there, coming up the road, were the three Friends, their horses walking with weary steps, and the riders, as Robert suggested, looking "solemn, solemner, solemnest." "I'll go out the back way when they get near the front, and after a bit drop in, by accident-like." And Robert, with a broad grin, disappeared.

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John met the Friends with a pleasant smile as they dismounted, and, regretting that he had not more comfortable seats to offer, arranged them as best he could on a bench, a box, and a pile of boards, and "the three owls" looked overburdened with wisdom.

"We have been with Friend Watson," commenced the spokesman, "this morning, and now are pained to say we have an unpleasant duty to perform."

"Yes?" remarked John, trying to look very serious and concerned; but the merry light that was ever in his eyes could not be dimmed even by so solemn an announcement, and the Friends stared at him as if they were ill at ease, and doubtless did wish themselves at home.

"Friend Watson," the spokesman continued, "has informed us that it was thee that took Ruth Davenport from the boat, forcibly removing her, and at an unseemly time of the night—"

"Hush!" rang through the shop, as if the old oak had been struck by lightning

and its fire yet played about John's eyes. Then and there the discussion of that aspect of the affair ceased. "And," remarked John, with anger still in his heart, "that she left the boat against her wishes is false, utterly false."

"But William Blake informed us-"

"Then William Blake spoke an untruth knowingly," replied John; "now continue if thee pleases."

"Thy vehemence does not speak well for thy entire innocence," slowly drawled one of the committee, who had until then been silent.

"Perhaps sufficient indignation might rouse thee to vehemence, or has thee no pride in thy good name?" asked John, with almost a sneer in his tone, and that committee-man lapsed into silence, with his fingers interlocked and thumbs twirling rapidly.

Then followed a short silence on the part of all, and, having gathered his scattered thoughts, the spokesman began again some glittering generality, but John's patience was

exhausted. As he had already so frequently done, he interrupted him in a firm way that admitted of no protest being entered, and remarked, calmly, slowly, and with such definiteness of expression that there would be no excuse if the committee wrongly reported him to the meeting.

"My Friends," John said, "I have been led, as you may know, to look with a more than merely friendly interest upon Ruth. Being myself free of all others, and believing her to be, I offered her my hand and she accepted it. Upon what ground her step-father disapproved I have never learned, but, what is of greater moment, her mother has not spoken against it. Ruth was opposed to returning to England, I equally so to have her go, but took no step to prevent it. Neighbor Watson withheld the whole truth, which made us suspicious, and that we were correct in our forebodings Robert Pearson fortunately and most unexpectedly discovered; but acting as he thought best, in his judgment and with Ruth's approval, he allowed Neighbor Watson's plans

to be carried out so far as Ruth's real welfare would permit. Then we jointly interfered, with the result you already know of." And then, taking a sheet of paper from his pocket, said, "Here is a letter from Revell Stacy, of Scarboro, England. It is addressed to Robert Pearson, and was received after Ruth's preparations to leave home were completed. It says, in part, 'This will was made seven years ago, and I suppose Ruth must be now quite of age, and so, if she desires, need not spend the closing years of her minority with her English kinsfolk.' In other words, her step-father was so anxious to be rid of her he withheld this part of his letter, and trusted that once away she would never return. I hold myself a Friend, and have never known Ruth to be other than soberly and discreetly mannered: and if the innocent mischief of childhood is to be treasured against us, who shall escape? Ruth is eighteen years of age in the coming month, and on her birthday I trust we shall be married."

The three sets of thumbs ceased twirling, the fingers unlocked, and "the owls" moved

uneasily. One of them pushed a leaning board so that it fell; another tried to clear his throat, in which was no obstruction. John waited for a reply, and, after unnecessary delay, the spokesman remarked, "We must report to the meeting thy words for their action; and thee has not yet passed meeting, John." The other Friends bobbed their huge hat-brims to signify their accordance with the spokesman's remarks. Then the three men arose as if to go.

But if they were done with John, he was not with them. "Am I to have no expression of your opinion before you go? Must you reserve this for the meeting? If so," continued John, "let me say that if your fears of the man overlook the wrong-doing of Neighbor Watson, I shall report the matter to another body. You come here as a committee, with hearts full of condemnation instead of overflowing with Christian charity, and now, knowing the whole truth, will not assure me that the scales have dropped from your eyes. I have seen Ruth, and we shall marry out of meeting if there is any attempt

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to frustrate our plans, and so be among you, but no longer belonging to the meeting. If I have been led astray as to my views of duty, I pray to be led back to the right path."

"Thy words suggest a firmer determination to marry Ruth than to remain a Friend," finally remarked the spokesman.

At this juncture Robert Pearson came strolling in, and, shaking hands with the committee, hoped they were well, passed upon the prospect of a favorable season, and then, looking up, said, "But you all look so very sober; I hope you have not been here to get measured for your coffins." And the committee almost smiled as they mechanically said, "Oh, no!"

John laughed, however, for he thought their plans had been coffined if they had not.

"Three owls on horseback," again remarked Robert, as they rode away.

"Their intentions were correct, perhaps; so let us be charitable."

"Charitable!" said Robert, with surprise.

"I believe you would find an excuse for the Old Boy if he grabbed you by the throat. Come, John, one may be too charitable."

"Not in this world; though it is the heaviest task that we are called upon to perform."

Chapter XX.

All's Well that ends Well.

"ARE they going to allow you any special privileges, John," asked Robert Pearson, "about this passing meeting? You can do so, next Thursday, if you choose, but what about Ruth? she will not leave the house, she says, until she is married; so there's a nice kettle of fish for you. It's a blessed good thing I didn't have any of this bother in my day, or perhaps I'd been a bachelor still."

"There is want of unity in the meeting, and I am sorry to be the cause of it. Ruth has chosen her birthday, and I think she has suffered enough, and I am not willing to disappoint her. Surely she has been sorely tried of late—"

"And, John, my man," remarked Robert, interrupting his friend, "she'll never drop in meekness sufficient to give in, or I'm wrong. If they want to keep her in meeting, they'll have to knuckle down just a little to her, for

this once, anyhow. There isn't another like her in the whole province."

"Yes, Robert; her mother."

"Cousin Anne; well, I don't know. She's a noble woman to go through with what she has had to and yet show up with a smiling face at times. I don't know how it is with you Quakers, some are so good and nice and some not so taking," replied Robert, in a way that showed he was talking as much to himself as to John Bishop.

"Is it not so with other people than the Friends? Where can you go and not find both saints and sinners?" asked John.

"It is easier to find the sinners, John, all times and everywhere. I never saw a saint, a real saint, but Ruth and her mother come as near to it as any this province is blessed with."

John smiled at Robert's enthusiasm, and remarked, "Although alike, yet they are very different."

"On the surface, yes, but they're of the same sort here." And Robert placed his hand over his heart. "But this is not time for one of Matthew Watson's idle gatherings," con-

tinued Robert; "you'll be married at my house, of course, since her loving step-father won't let her go home."

"That is Ruth's wish; but there are Friends who object and say it will promote discord. I am sorely puzzled."

"Well, John, I wish I was the king for half a day. I'd settle the matter and shut up mouths at the same time," said Robert, impatiently.

"Thee would not make it a case of hasty marriage and leisurely repentance, I hope."

"You're not to be argued with to-day, that's certain. I'll consult with Ruth, and you can do as we decide or not; but there's no danger as to what your decision will be. If you don't mind your words, John, pretty closely, the neighbors will say, 'John's wife is more clever than her husband.'"

John laughed at this and said, "Why, I have always said Ruth was more clever than any one I knew."

"Yes, but that is excepting yourself, and that won't do. Anyhow, I see I'm not through with this business yet. I'll see Ruth and arrange particulars."

As John Bishop had said, the proposed wedding had caused a dissension, and several members of the meeting expressed themselves so freely that serious trouble was feared. John did not attend, even on First day, but calmly awaited the decision of a new committee to whom the whole matter was referred. What he feared would be the case resulted. There was a division; and if he and Ruth were married on the chosen date and at Pearson's they would be subject to discipline, and then the question of legality might arise: was the wedding in accordance with the customs of the Friends? And if not, and no magistrate was present, or hireling priest performed the ceremony, might not trouble be the outcome, and their opponents triumph in a manner to blight their whole lives? John could stand anything for her sake, but was powerless to alter the decision of constituted authorities. No wonder he was sorely troubled.

"Please don't set me wild by all this law and custom and so on," said Ruth, when Robert placed the matter before her. "What

does John say? How should I know? But oh, dear, I did want it to be on my birthday, as John and I planned. And if it's wrong one day, why not another?" And Ruth threatened to treat the Pearsons to an hysterical scene, which her cousin Robert neatly avoided by saying,—

"There is a difference of opinion in the matter."

"Is there? Do some think it would be right? Then tell John I side with them, and let the matter 'go to court,' do you call it? afterwards," exclaimed Ruth, with more enthusiasm than calm judgment; and added, "But what do you think, Cousin Robert? tell me that."

"That it will come out all right, Fairie; but I'm not a judge or man of the law."

"You're enough of a one for me, if John's willing." And with this decision, preparations for the wedding rapidly proceeded.

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The day was perfect; such a one as, in this region, can only come in the month of May. Pearson's orchard and the apple-trees

that lined his lane were in full bloom, and the huge wild crab-tree, with its wealth of roseate blossoms, perfumed the air for a long distance. Millions of busy bees were humming among the flowers, and the birds that through the winter had been far away were now again in their summer homes and rejoicing as these returned wanderers always do. The best features of the year were spread in profusion, and with the clear blue sky, with peaceful clouds floating leisurely across it, combined to make a most fitting background for the ending of long weeks of anxiety and pain and the beginning of a lifetime, let us hope, of unalloyed pleasure.

By noon the neighbors generally had congregated about the Pearson mansion, and after the usual greetings and comments they gathered in the spacious parlor, that needed to-day no interior decoration, though this was not lacking, as every window was open and the flowers were peeping in, and the merriest birds posted themselves on the nearest bushes. When the guests were seated, a short silence ensued, and then was

heard footsteps and the rustling of silk and satin. John Bishop and Ruth entered the room, and, occupying the chairs reserved for them, sat facing the company. Then silence again, only broken at last by John rising and holding out his hand to Ruth, who also rose and said those words of mighty import that forever bound him to her. She made like promises to him, and they were married.

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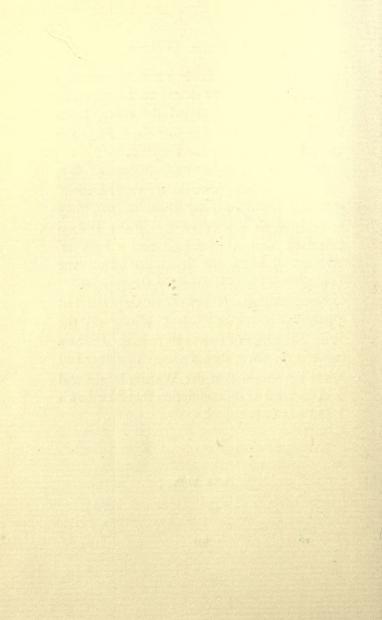
The marriage certificate, brought under protest and not likely to be accepted, was signed by those present, but lacked the one signature Ruth most highly prized,—her mother's. Then the restraint of formality and of solemnity fell away, and the buzz and hum of many voices filled the room. There was now an end to the mystery, and the good people of the valley must find some other subject for discussion and wondering. While the excitement was at its height and every one talking at if not to his fellow, a little incident caused a momentary pause. For reasons she alone could explain, but many correctly surmised, the Watsons had

not been present. Now, her daughter married, she was free to come to her cousin's house, and as she entered the room, Ruth saw her mother for the first time since the day of her departure for England.

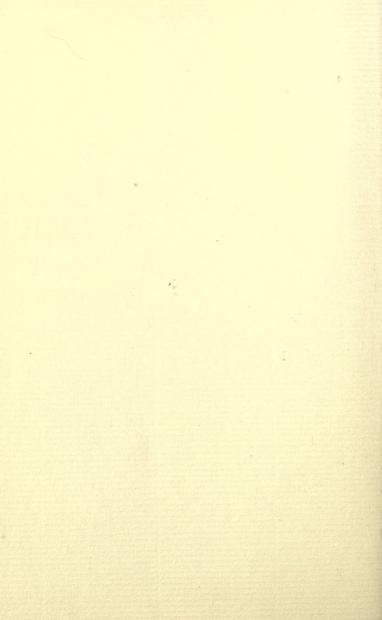
There was a quick exclamation of joy, and in another moment, the words "Mother," "Ruth," heard only by those nearest, they were in each other's arms. John Bishop stood by with arms folded and a look of triumph lighting his handsome face, the proudest and happiest man in the province.

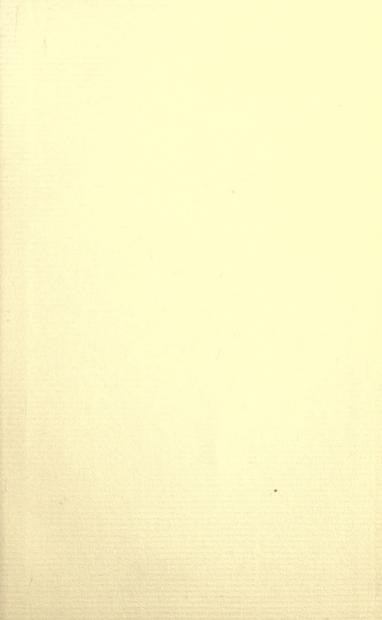
Soon the guests began to disperse, but there was a rumor current among all the little gatherings of two or three in the Pearson yard to the effect that Thomas Gardiner had spent the morning at the Watson house, and had declared as his conviction that Matthew's mind was unbalanced.

THE END.









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